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WEASEL TIM.

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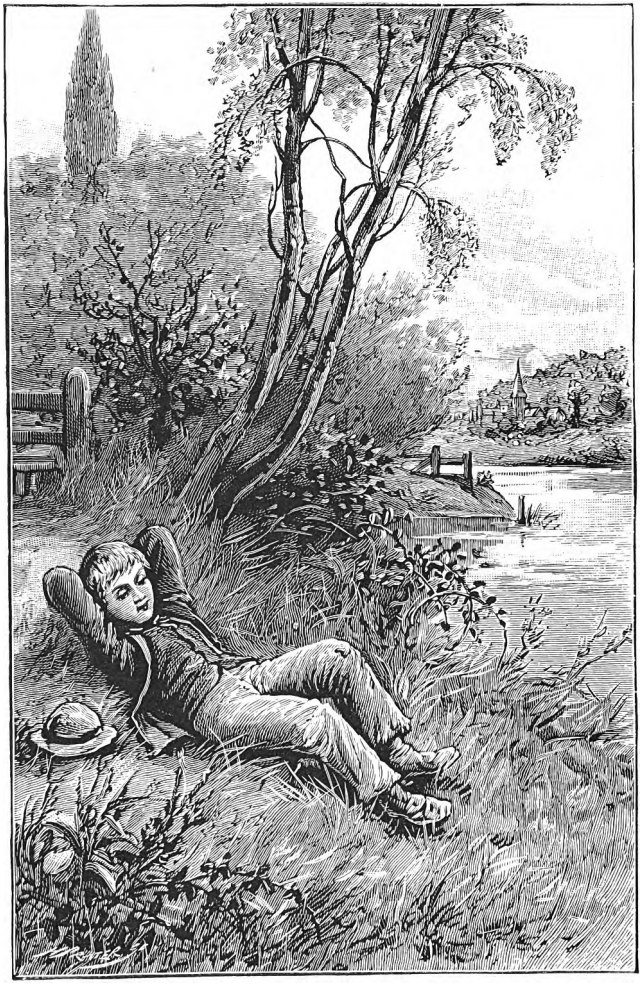

"Lay on his back and mused contentedly."—*Page 19.*

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WEASEL TIM.

BY

BESSIE MARCHANT

(MRS. J. A. COMFORT).

London:

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2 CASTLE STREET, CITY ROAD, E.C.

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"The swallow stopt as he hunted the bee,
The snake slipt under a spray,
The wild hawk stood with the down on his beak,
And stared, with his foot on the prey,
And the nightingale thought 'I have sung many songs,
But never a one so gay,'
For he sings of what the world will be
When the years have passed away."

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WEASEL TIM.

CHAPTER I.

PROSPECT PLACE.

NO grubby, misnamed city street, was Prospect Place, Witford, but a group of pleasant cottage homes perched on a high hill, about half a mile from Witford town.

Below in the green valley, the river wound like a silver streak through the meadows, until it disappeared behind the houses of Witford High Street.

Standing half-way down the slope to the river, with its back turned in unfriendly fashion to the road, and the cheerful row of houses called Prospect Place, was an old-fashioned thatched cottage in a very bad state of repair. Practical people said that such a rubbishing, tumbledown place should be pulled down and carried away, though artists raved about

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the picturesque gables, and the ruddy shading of the weather-stained, moss-grown thatch.

Nor were the inhabitants of the cottage one whit more respectable than their habitation, nor had they the somewhat questionable virtue of being picturesque either.

Simon Marks, the head of the household, was a small, lean, sandy-whiskered man of middle age, with furtive eyes, and a slouching gait. His occupation in life might best be described as various; sometimes he would work for a few weeks for some neighbouring farmer, and carry home his weekly wage with great regularity; tiring of that, he would provide himself with a store of tin pots and pans, and tramp the country, his stock-in-trade depending from his shoulders. The returns from such a venture would often be absurdly disproportionate to the outlay and labour involved, and food and drink would not only be found in plenty in the ill-managed household, but the quality would be far superior to that usually met with in the homes of the working classes.

Simon Marks was a widower, or at least people supposed him to be such, as his house was kept by a fierce-looking, feminine counterpart of himself, whom the neighbours knew as Lucy Giles, and whom little, sharp-featured Tim called Aunt Luce.

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Tim was the only child of the household, and if you had searched Prospect Place, or even busy Witford itself, it would have been hard to find a more repulsive, or unlovable-looking child. He was small, and sandy-complexioned like his father, from whom he had also inherited the furtive eyes and down-trodden, slouching gait. The children of Prospect Place had nick-named him Weasel Tim, and it would have been difficult to have found a title more appropriate. Sly in appearance, cowering in manner, but easily provoked to a state of passionate irritation, Weasel Tim speedily became a byword in Prospect Place, and was shunned, or held up to ridicule as the fancy of the hour dictated.

Apart from the taunts of his contemporaries, the chief evil of Tim's life was the School Board Officer, who appeared in Prospect Place with quite alarming frequency on those occasions when Tim had been enjoying a short vacation on his own account.

Weasel Tim hated school only worse than he hated the School Board Officer, and he would shiver and shrink on his way thither, as though some terrible punishment were about to be meted out to him. Though it is possible that it was not so much the monotonous drudgery against which he revolted, as the gibes and sneers of his fellow-scholars, who thought it fine sport to indulge in pointing the finger

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of scorn at the lonely boy, whenever the back of the master was turned towards them.

One hot afternoon in the middle of July, when the crowded school-room seemed to be one vast bath of simmering heat, and steaming perspiration, Weasel Tim sat in one corner of his class, toiling painfully at a sum in simple subtraction, feebly portrayed on a damp, greasy bit of slate. The sum was only half done, and school was nearly over, yet Tim knew with a dismal certainty that unless every figure along the misty, greasy line could be proved right before the bell rang, he would be close prisoner for another hour or more, until the work was finished; for the schoolmaster always seemed to be extra intent on the conscientious discharge of his duty where Tim was concerned; very possibly because the opportunity of doing it was so hard to get at.

"'Two from four, two, and three from seven, four;" that was easy enough; but Tim stopped short in his whispered calculation to stare aghast at the next two figures; "eight from six, why you can't, o' course, seein' as how eight has got two more in it than six, to begin with; master's made a mistake this time, I reckon."

Tim's attention began to wander then, and in fancy he was lying on the short, cool grass of the meadow

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outside his father's garden gate, listening to the song of the skylark high above him, and the pleasant babble of the river below. Oh, it was good to be there, and by and by, when he was rested from his scholastic exertions, he would go and filch a few eggs from the nest of a water-hen that he knew of, they would prove an appetising adjunct to his supper, and——

"Clang, clang-a-lang, clang, lang-a-clang." It was the master's bell giving the signal for the stopping of the afternoon's work, and hearing it, Tim woke from his reverie with a start, and became suddenly very industrious.

"Timothy Marks, have you finished your sum?" asked the petulant voice of the tired pupil teacher, a lame boy, with a white, weary face, and tired eyes.

"No, I can't do it, because it's set wrong," he answered, trying to speak confidently, hoping against hope, that his solution of the mystery was the right one, yet desperately afraid that there might after all be some abstruse method of going to work by which means six might be made to expand sufficiently to include eight, and even to leave a margin as well.

"It can't be wrong, let me see," and with a sigh, the young teacher was about to take the slate from Tim's hand, when the master called to him.

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"Willie White, has Timothy Marks finished his sum?"

Willie's hand relaxed its hold of the slate, and Willie's voice answered, almost with relief: "No, sir."

"Let him be locked in then. I will see to him after tea."

Tim's head dropped forward on his breast, and a low sob escaped him, a sob of anger and disappointment, for the cool grass, the warbling skylark, the babbling river, and the nest of the water-hen, how very far away they had been pushed by the relentless hand of the master, who stood to him as embodied fate.

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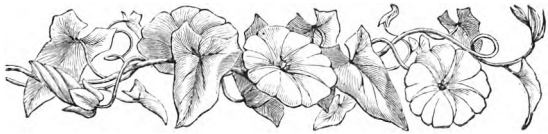

CHAPTER II.

THE ESCAPE.

THE sum appeared no easier of solution, when with great noise and shouting, the other children had escaped from durance, and Tim was left alone.

For a little time he pored over the greasy, misty figures, but finding his application of no avail, he took to drawing lines on the unoccupied part of the slate with his pencil, until finally he threw slate and pencil aside with a gesture of weariness, and dropping his arms on the desk before him, pillowed his head on them and went to sleep.

It was growing cooler when he awoke, and a breath of air, laden with the fragrance of the hay-fields, stole in at the open window, arousing with redoubled vigour, his longing for the river-side meadows.

Raising his head sharply, his eye was caught by the open window, with one bound he cleared the desk,

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and clambering on to a bench, took a careful survey, to see if haply he might hope to escape undetected by the watchful eyes of the master.

The open window was a decided oversight, for the master never put temptation in the way of the boys, deeming it his business rather to guard them from it.

And it so chanced that this same window was the one most easy of egress, as it looked, not on to the street as the others did, but on to a little back yard, where the pump was. It was easy work for a small, active boy like Tim, to creep on to the window-sill, and swing himself over, dropping from thence to the ground, a distance of perhaps six feet.

Tim came to the ground with a heavier bump than he had anticipated, and for some moments sat on the dusty pavement rubbing himself ruefully, then remembering that the work of escape was not yet complete, he rose painfully, and hurrying along a narrow passage by the side of the school-house, softly opened the gate and let himself into the street.

There were few people about just then, and fear of being seen and ordered back to work gave an impetus to his feet and sent him flying down the street at a great rate.

At the bottom of the hill he halted, reflected seriously for a brief moment, and then turning sharply

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to the left, ran down a green lane, clambered a high gate at the bottom, and found himself in a wide stretch of green meadow. But this particular meadow belonged to Doctor Hylton, and there was a very much defaced notice board nailed to the trunk of an elm tree near the gate, warning trespassers that they were in danger of prosecution. Tim scudded across the short, springy turf like a frightened rabbit, and creeping through a hole in the hedge, gave an exultant caper, winding up by turning head over heels on the grass, for there was the river all aglow with the brightness of the setting sun, and on the slope above him, his father's cottage, while higher up still, the row of houses belonging to Prospect Place.

For awhile he danced and sang after a fashion of his own, and though the dancing was wild and uncouth, the trill of the wordless song was bird-like in its sweetness.

Tiring at length of such violent exercise, he went along the river, and flinging himself down close to the water's edge, lay on his back and mused contentedly. The unfinished subtraction sum had nothing to do with his reverie, however. Tim thought it quite bad enough to be forced to attend school and made to read and spell, and do sums that had no meaning for him beyond an endless botherment, so he avoided

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even thinking of the evil, unless by force of circumstances it was present with him.

Presently the sound of voices near at hand broke in upon his musings, and raising his head a little, he peered above the tall grass to discover who the intruders were.

Then he saw his father leaning against the bole of a pollard willow, smoking a short black pipe, and talking to Mrs. Giles, who on her knees, at the water's edge, was intent on cleansing something in the river.

"It's main hard to get off, Simon," she remarked, rubbing away with great vigour.

"Eh, lass! but keep on, you'll move it, never fear," he answered.

"What are you doing, Aunt Luce?" cried Tim, springing up from the grass, and coming towards them.

The woman uttered an exclamation of surprise and dismay, and thrust the garden shovel which she was scouring, into the water with all speed, while Simon Marks took his pipe out of his mouth and gave utterance to an ugly word or two, which, however, did not frighten Tim, for the simple reason that he had heard them so often before.

"I'm mindin' of my business, where be you sprung from?" she said, tartly, recovering her self-possession, and scrubbing away at the shovel harder than ever.

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"School," retorted Tim, with scornful emphasis. "Master locked I in, but he forgot as how he hadn't locked the window."

His father and aunt laughed, making it evident that their sympathies were not on the side of the master.

Then drawing some money from his pocket, Simon Marks held it towards Tim, saying: "Look here, lad, run you as far as Doctor Hylton's and ask him if he can give me a somethink to stop the toothache; tell him it was so bad last night that I didn't get a single wink o' sleep till arter daybreak, and it's beginning for to ache again now."

There was a grin of provoking intelligence on Tim's freckled face as he clutched the money, and he replied calmly: "That's a good'un now, father, why you was over in Maggot's Grove last night, popping squiddies."

Simon Marks raised his hand to deal the boy a blow, whilst an ugly scowl overspread his face, but Tim, ducking deftly to avoid the blow, said, cheerfully: "It's all right, guv'nor, there ain't no occasion to worrit yersel'. I'll get yer the stuff, and much good may it do."

The man growled an inaudible something, but the threatening look left his face, and he nodded his head once or twice as though in approval of his son's penetration.

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"Don't forget to say how bad I was last night; you can tell him if you like, that you didn't get any sleep either, for the dreadful groaning that I made."

At this, Tim was fain to roll on the ground in the exuberance of his mirth, after which he jumped up, shaking himself as a dog might, and trotted off in the direction of the doctor's house, though not without a regretful look backward at the shining river, and cool, green turf.

"He ain't no soft, that boy ain't," commented Simon Marks with considerable paternal pride, as he gazed after Tim's retreating figure.

"He's a deal too 'cute, to my way o' thinking," replied Mrs. Giles, severely; "you'll both on you come to a bad end if you don't have a care, Simon. If you want to lead a shady life yersel', you might at least bring the boy up to decent notions."

But the man only laughed in a mocking manner, and the cleansing of the shovel being by this time completed, they strolled back through the meadow towards the tumbledown cottage they called home.

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CHAPTER III.

POPPING SQUIDDIES.

THE sun had disappeared below the western horizon before Tim returned with the bottle of medicine.

His father was leaning against the door-post when he entered the gate, and holding out his hand for the physic, said, with a laugh: "Give it here, boy, I'll stow it in the cupboard till it's wanted."

Tim gave him the bottle, and following him into the house, looked anxiously round to see what chances there were of supper.

A wood fire smouldered on the open hearth, and close to the hot embers was set a small brown pipkin, at sight of which the anxiety left Tim's face, and instead, he rubbed his hands in gleeful expectation

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"What's for supper, Aunt Luce?" he ventured, meekly enough.

Mrs. Giles turned towards the fire with a sort of repressed exasperation in her air and movement.

"Better than you deserve by a long sort," she answered, harshly, lifting the pipkin from the ashes, and pouring the contents into a yellow basin standing on the bare and not over clean deal table, which occupied the centre of the room.

"Oh, my, don't it jest smell good," ejaculated Tim, cutting a caper on the uneven stone-paved floor. Then bringing a stool from the fireside, he planted it beside the table, and sitting down, fell to work at the savoury mess of meat and vegetables that Mrs. Giles had emptied into the basin.

For a little time silence reigned in the cottage room, saving for the clicking of Tim's spoon against the basin, or his very audible mastication, while Mrs. Giles mused or slept with her head resting against the chimney jamb, and Simon Marks smoked his pipe at the open door.

At length, Tim, having finished his supper, joined his father in the doorway, and the two gazed out on the darkening stretches of meadow land, and the steely gleam of the river.

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The distant call of a pheasant came borne on the still evening air, and at the sound Tim raised his head with a jerk to look at his father's face.

"Will you take me along wid yer to-night, father?" he asked, an almost pathetic entreaty quivering in his voice.

"I'm goin' to bed," retorted Simon Marks with scowling brevity.

"But you'll be a gettin' up by and by, when it's late. I heard you last night, and I wanted to go with you awful bad."

"You heard me? Nonsense! You were as sound asleep as a log, breathing reg'lar and all. Why, I held the candle before your eyes, and you didn't even wink," said the father, incredulously.

Tim laughed. "I worn't asleep for all that. I kin sham like anything. I'm a deal sharper nor you may think."

"What would you do if you did come?" asked Simon Marks, regarding his son with attentive eyes.

"Carry the bag, help to fix the nets, or watch if you like. I don't care what it is so as I may come."

"All right, mum's the word," replied the other,

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and Tim shuffled his feet in dumb pantomime, expressive of his satisfaction and delight.

Presently, taking the short pipe from his mouth, Simon Marks knocked the ashes out against the door-post, and said that he thought he would go to bed, upon which Tim, with a mighty yawn, said that he also desired to slumber.

Father and son disappeared up the winding staircase, without the, to them, superfluous ceremony of saying good-night to Mrs. Giles, who still lingered with her head against the chimney jamb.

There were a few shuffling sounds on the bare boards of the room above, and then silence. The voices of the children playing in the road in front of Prospect Place had long since become still, and only the occasional twang of a bicycle bell in the high road, or the more frequently uttered cry of the distant pheasant obtruded on the brooding quiet.

Presently, Mrs. Giles having finished her nap, or her ruminations, rose from her crouching over the now dead fire, and after some little groping about the dark room, shut the outer door, and then climbed the stairs to her bed.

Some three hours later, just when the summer night was at its darkest, Simon Marks rose from

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the bed, whereon he had flung himself all dressed as he was, and reaching forward to the corner where Tim's bed stood, under the slope of the thatch, he felt for the boy in the darkness, and gave him a gentle shake.

Light as was his touch it was enough, and springing up with alacrity, Tim shook himself, declaring in a cheerful whisper that he was quite ready.

"Come on then, and be quiet," adjured the man, stealing cautiously downstairs in his stockinged feet, with Tim creeping after him.

It took but a moment to find their boots, and carrying them still in their hands, they opened the door and went forth into the quiet night.

It was moonless, dark, and still, save for an occasional sighing sough of the wind through the branches of the pollard willows lining the banks of the river.

Tim grimaced a little to himself in the darkness, as his bootless feet pattered over the rough uneven stones of the pathway, but he told himself that he wasn't going to make a fuss about a trifle like that when there was so much fun to be had at the cost of enduring it.

Softly pushing open the broken gate of the garden, Simon Marks dropped on the soft grass of the

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meadow, and rapidly drew on his boots, Tim following his example with all possible speed.

Just then there came the very faintest rustle of a chain, and a low whine; laying his hand for a moment on Tim's arm to enjoin silence, Simon Marks stole softly back towards a lean-to shed at the side of the house, tiptoeing across the stones as silently as a cat.

Back again he came a moment later, and at the same time a cold wet nose was poked into Tim's hand, and a thick stumpy tail beat a happy tattoo against his legs.

Simon Marks was laughing softly as he rejoined his son, and when they had stolen a few yards further, under cover of the thick hedgerow, he said in a low whisper: "The perlice is waitin' outside in the road."

"Where?" breathed Tim, with a little shiver of delighted apprehension.

"Look," said his father, pausing before a small hole in the hedge.

Regardless of scratches, Tim thrust his head into the opening, and peered out into the dusty highway. At first he could see nothing, but after awhile became conscious of a burly figure standing like a statue in the middle of the road,

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staring fixedly at the old thatched house, with its one window peeping from under a frowning gable of thatch.

"He's looking to see me start," Simon said, with another laugh, as Tim withdrew his head from the hedge gap.

Tim laughed too, a low, happy cackle of pure enjoyment, for, to his limited experience of pleasure, this unlawful midnight expedition, with a baffled constable watching for them, was the keenest, most exquisite delight that ever he had known.

They walked fast after that, the dog following close at their heels, skirting various hedgerows, and crossing a field or two, they emerged at length close to Wyloe Mill, a decayed woollen manufactory, which, however, still kept up a semblance of business by means of some antiquated looms, and a faulty old water-wheel.

Here there was a wooden foot-bridge over the river, and crossing this, Tim and his father took their way to the higher ground on the other side.

Passing through a field of oats, their slender, graceful stems moving very slightly in the soft night air, the dog suddenly sprang in front of them, and

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dashing into the standing corn, was lost to sight for a moment or two. Simon Marks halted abruptly, and stood intently listening to the rustling of the dog in the oat stems, then there was a sudden startled fluttering, and a bird cry broken short as the hunter seized his prey, and after a little more rustling the dog reappeared, and laid something at the feet of his master.

"Good dog, good dog," ejaculated Simon Marks, in low-voiced commendation, and stuffing the bird, which was, considering the time of year, a remarkably plump, well-grown young partridge, into his pocket, they hurried on, for there was no time to be lost if they wished to be in time for any sport among the rabbits in Maggot's Grove, or as they were termed in local poaching parlance, "squiddies."

The oat-field was a large one, and twice again, before they reached its farther side, did the dog disappear to return each time with a partridge to lay at his master's feet, receiving always an encouraging pat, and a low-worded commendation.

Maggot's Grove was a thickly wooded hillside, in places so steep as to make walking almost impossible, save by hanging on to the branches, or catching for aid at the slender hazel stems.

Simon Marks, who apparently knew his business

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to perfection, led the way to a dry, sandy hollow, opening on one side into a corn-field. Here he directed Tim to lie flat down in the long rank grass, giving him at the same time a silk net stretched on a steel hoop with a long handle, not unlike a butterfly catcher, but larger and stronger. A muttered direction as to its use, and then armed with a similar net, the man laid himself down at a little distance, and the dog, scarcely behind his master in intelligence, crouched also, and the waiting began.

A few insects stirred in the grass, the night wind moaned through the standing corn, and an owl flew over them, hooting mournfully as it made for the ruined tower of Winster Abbey.

At length a colder blast rustled the tree-tops, the birds awoke and commenced to twitter, and a few faint streaks in the eastern sky proclaimed that the dawn was near at hand.

And now the sandy hollow swarmed with life, as hundreds upon hundreds of rabbits set out to forage for their breakfast, and it was comparatively easy work to deftly drop the long-handled hoop over the back of the unsuspecting creatures as they trotted past, and no sooner did the silken meshes tighten over the backs of the victims than the watching dog sprang forward, and with one grip of his active jaws,

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settled the fate of that particular squiddy without giving it time for even a chance of escape.

For an hour they worked thus, and then daylight having fully come, though the sun had not yet appeared over the edge of the horizon, Simon Marks declared it time to stop, and they at once proceeded to count their bag.

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CHAPTER IV.

THE SUBSTITUTE.

TIM was late at school that morning, not appearing until ten minutes after the bell had rung for prayers, and then slinking into his place with a very manifest desire to remain unnoticed, but the keen eye of the master saw him at once, and hardly had he taken his seat, than his name was called, and he had to go forward and stand, a shivering, shrinking little coward, in front of the master's desk.

For a moment the master remained intent on the exercise he was correcting, then looking up, he began to speak in his clear, decisive tones, whilst every boy in the school ceased his work to listen.

"Timothy Marks," began the master, "I have to apologise to you for locking you in last night, and forgetting to come and let you out again. The reason for my forgetfulness was that the vicar sent

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for me to go and confer with him, and I was detained until nearly ten o'clock. Under these circumstances I am quite prepared to forgive you the breach of discipline you were guilty of in getting out of the window and running away."

The dejection disappeared like magic from Tim's face, though there was plenty of unbelieving astonishment upon it, especially when the master picking up Tim's slate, which, by some mysterious means, had reached his desk, continued:

"I am the more disposed to overlook the fact of your running away, as I see that you were painstaking enough to finish your sum before departing."

Tim's mouth came open in the most approved fly-trap fashion, as he looked at the greasy, dirty bit of slate, with the straggling, ill-made figures upon it, then he put up his fist to rub his eyes, thinking that his vision must have played him false, yet no amount of rubbing altered the fact that the sum was done, and that the figures looked like his.

The master put his awkwardness and silence down to rustic shamefacedness, and kindly motioned him to return to his seat, saying, as the boy turned to go: "I should like you to go and do me three sums as well as you have done that one, for there is not a figure wrong anywhere."

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Then Tim took his slate and returned to his place, feeling like a respited criminal, whose punishment is none the less sure to come because it has been delayed for a little.

In a sort of dazed fashion he looked round among his school-fellows, wondering, as well he might, who it was that had taken the trouble to do him a good turn, which was after all, by reason of his ignorance, a bad turn, as it credited him with scholarship that he did not possess.

But the boys were all looking careless and unconcerned, occupied, those in sight of the master, with a semblance of industry, and those in the background, with a reality of mischief, none, however, betraying any self-consciousness as his bewildered gaze traversed their countenances. One or two returned his look with grimacing protrusion of tongues, whilst a sibilant whisper of "Weasel Tim" passed down the back desks, causing Tim to shiver apprehensively, as he bethought him of his last night's occupation and its likeness to weasel propensities.

Willie White, the weary-faced pupil teacher, was sitting in a distant corner laboriously instructing some six or seven small boys in the mysteries of the multiplication table: he had taken no notice of Tim that morning, though usually his nod and smile

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were the one little green oasis in the drear sandy desert of the boy's school-day.

One hour passed, and the next was well on its way, when suddenly the master's clear voice came in upon Tim's unprofitable meditations, cutting them short.

"Timothy Marks, are those sums done?"

"No, please, sir." Tim's voice faltered a little, as well it might, for a long supple cane was lying on the master's desk, and Tim was not unacquainted with its uses.

"Bring your slate here."

Tim rose, clutching mechanically at his slate, and conscious of nothing so much as the swish of that yard of pliant timber, which the master just lifted and jerked through the air, as though to quicken Tim's faculties, and enable him the better to concentrate his whole attention upon his sums.

There was a dumb pleading in the boy's eyes as he gave his slate into the master's hand, as though he were silently protesting against the hardness of his fate, and being not a harsh man, but a naturally kind and just one, the master stayed for a moment the summary execution of justice, although not one figure of the sums had been done, whilst

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he made closer inquiry of the shrinking little mortal before him.

"Why have you not done, not even attempted those sums?" he asked, his voice a shade less stern than it should have been, solely by reason of the pathos in Tim's grey eyes.

"I can't, sir, 'cos, please, sir, they won't go," was the quivering, eager answer.

"Won't go, why not?"

"Please, sir, I don't know; but I think they've been set upside down, 'cos it says here eight from six, and you can't get eight things out of six, nohows!" There was a decidedly hopeful ring in Tim's voice now, for he felt that at last he had a chance to explain matters, and that reason was on his side.

"But you can borrow," came the decisive and unmoved reply.

Blank dismay on Tim's face. He had not remembered that; then a recollection of a portion of his very scanty home-teaching came to him, and he replied, glibly, yet with no thought of defiance: "Please, sir, Aunt Luce says them as goes a borrerin' goes a sorrerin'."

The master's face resumed its sternness, and his hand dropped lightly on to his cane, but his voice

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was perfectly calm as he said: "In this case it is you who will go sorrowing if you don't borrow; but what I want to know is, how did you get that sum right last night if you did not borrow?"

"Please, sir, I didn't, I—I didn't do it."

"Then who did?"

"Please, sir, I don't know."

The master meditated for a moment, gently see-sawing the cane in the air as he did so, then he asked another question: "What did you do after I left you locked in yesterday afternoon?"

"Please, sir, I—I went to sleep."

"Oh, and when you awoke you crawled through the window and went home?"

Tim nodded, he could not speak; and the cane was being slowly poised for a blow.

"Come here."

But before poor terror-stricken Tim could obey the injunction and put himself in position to feel the full smart of the descending cane, there was a rustling of feet behind him, he was gently pushed aside, and a voice eager and tremulous said: "Please, sir, don't beat Tim Marks, it was I who did the sum, and I am very sorry."

Master and boys alike stared with amazement, for the speaker was Willie White, the lame pupil-teacher,

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who had never in the remembrance of any boy present been known to commit any breach of the rules, or to be guilty of the slightest deviation from honesty and veracity.

"You?" asked the master, incredulously.

"Yes, sir, I was early at school this morning, and seeing Tim's slate lying on the desk where he had left it last night, and with the sum not done, I did it straight off, and took it to your desk."

"Why did you do it, because this boy is your friend, and you wanted to please him?"

"No, sir, we're not friends in particular, and I didn't think of pleasing him either, but it was on my conscience that I ought to have helped him yesterday." Willie White alternately flushed and paled as he spoke, whilst his nervous hands clasped and unclasped behind his back.

The master's face was sad, and his voice was low and stern when he spoke again. "I have always comforted myself with the thought that I had one boy in the school in whom I could put implicit trust and confidence, and that boy was yourself, Willie White, and I cannot tell you how grieved I am to find myself mistaken in you."

Willie White hung his head, but made no attempt to defend himself, or plead for a renewal of his

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master's confidence; keenly as he felt the rebuke, his conscience told him that he deserved it all, and therefore he could but dumbly acquiesce.

Meanwhile, Tim, thrust suddenly into the background, was staring at the lame boy with a wondering gaze, half scorning him for his, to him, unnecessary confession, yet wholly admiring the courage which had induced Willie to face the imminent risk of a caning.

Then the master spoke again. "Come here, Willie. Since you chose to aid and abet Timothy Marks in deceiving me, it is but just that you should share the punishment. Hold out your hand."

Willie White stood statue-like with outspread palm, whilst the little cane hissed through the air and descended with cruel emphasis upon his quivering flesh.

But an involuntary sob escaped him as the punishment was over. He was free to return to his place. It was not so much the pain, keen though it was, as the humiliation of being thrashed in the presence of the boys who were his companions, and the little boys whom he had to teach, after all the years of his hitherto blameless school life.

Tim, stepping forward in his turn to receive his share of stripes, was strangely moved by that sob and

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the strained, almost agonised expression of Willie's pale face.

So stirred and absorbed was he by this exhibition of suffering endured on his account, that his own part of the pain seemed lessened almost to a thing of little moment, although, true to his habits, he roared lustily as the whack, whack, whack sounded on his hard brown hand.

The school was unwontedly quiet and orderly that morning, and many a stolen glance was taken towards that part of the room where the lame boy sat, with his pale, patient face, doing his drudgery of teaching. But he never once looked up to discover the sympathy that he had evoked, and in his heart was dreading the moment when he must see the faces of his school-fellows, expecting to find nothing thereon but scorn and loss of esteem, just as his fancy painted them.

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CHAPTER V.

AT "THE BARLEY MOW."

THE road from Witford, through Prospect Place, led, after considerable meandering up hill and down dale, to a small village clinging to the side of a steep, barren hillside, called Rawnley.

This place, by reason of its smallness and isolation, had no church, nor even a school-room, yet boasted two beershops, where the villagers spent a serious margin of their scanty earnings, and befuddled their still more scanty brains on the drugged and unwholesome liquor dispensed by the respective landlords.

The particular beershop, wherein for the moment our interest lies, was a small house on the lowest ground in Rawnley, called "The Barley Mow." It

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stood at that particular corner where the road takes a sharp turn upwards from the river, while its various barns and piggeries, built on the slope above it, were even more ruinous and poverty-stricken than the house itself.

Towards this place, Tim was wending his way very early on the Saturday morning following the day when Willie White had been thrashed for doing his sum. A heavy basket was strapped upon his back, and he looked even more shrinking and sly in appearance than usual, although as his basket was ostensibly filled with cabbages the reason for this was not apparent.

Once or twice the children he met greeted him, but he barely responded to their salutations, and seemed only intent on getting the cabbages to their destination.

Just outside the door of "The Barley Mow" he met the landlord, a one-legged man with a sinister cast of countenance.

"Well, boy, what brings you here?" this worthy asked, shifting himself a little on his crutch, and scrutinising Tim and the basket.

"Father sent me. He's gone hoeing to-day for Squire Maythorne, and it worn't convenient, he said, to come last night." As Tim brought out these

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last words he contrived to execute a wink of intense meaning and portent, seeing which the man turned sharply, and, entering the house, beckoned the boy to follow him.

It was very dark inside after the glaring hill road outside, and Tim stumbled and almost fell, recovering himself, however, and contriving to save his basket from emptying itself on the stone floor of the passage.

"Have a care, lad," growled the man, leading the way into a low, dark room, half cellar, half store, that had been hollowed from the hill at the side.

Here, Tim slipped the burden from his aching shoulders, and heaved a great sigh of relief as he placed it on the ground.

"What have you got?" demanded the landlord of "The Barley Mow," eyeing those cabbages with a keener interest than it was usual for him to bestow on that useful vegetable, which he most often characterised as "green trash."

Again Tim winked, only it was too dark for it to be fully appreciated, and, instead of answering, dropped on his knees and commenced throwing the cabbages out on the floor. Underneath the double layer of green stuff, with feathers just slightly ruffled

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where the mouth of the dog had seized them, lay some ten or twelve partridges, their limp hanging necks pathetic in death.

"They ain't over big, nor fat either!" growled the man.

"Father says, 'What can you expect when it's six weeks to the shooting?'" replied Tim, promptly.

"But then the risk is so much less now than later," was the grumbling response; and then the birds, deprived of their legitimate six weeks longer of happy life, were taken out of the basket and straightway subjected to a freezing process, after which they were stowed for safe keeping in a cellar, and Tim was free to return.

His errand accomplished, he frisked along the dusty road as joyously as a young lamb, climbing into the thorny hedgerows in search of late dog roses, or sprays of tender-leaved clematis. Tiring very soon of the monotony of the highway, he pushed his basket through a hole in the hedge, and crawling through after it, went careering over the fields in the direction of the river.

When once he had reached the water's edge his progress homeward became decidedly slower, and the morning was well advanced before he even

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reached the old Wyloe Mill, which was about half-way between Prospect Place and "The Barley Mow" at Rawnley.

There was a little group of boys fishing for tadpoles in a narrow back water behind the mill, and some of them shouted for Tim to come and join them in their sport; but others retorted that "they wanted no sly, thieving weasels to join their play," and Tim, who at first, with the instinctive love of childhood for its kind, had pressed eagerly forward to join them, fell back with a hurt, wondering look upon his face like a wounded animal, who, though it feels the pain, can show only mute wonder at the reason for its infliction.

"For shame, George Blake! How can you be so cruel?" cried a voice from out of a cluster of tall reeds growing near, and Tim, who was slinking away, stopped at once when he saw that Willie White was lying on the bank, half hidden by the reeds.

"Yah, don't you go a sticking up for he, Willie White, you'll only get yourself in for another caning, and you are a sight too good to be thrashed for the likes of he," retorted George Blake, a black-haired, bull-necked boy of twelve.

Willie's pale face flushed a sudden crimson, for

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the subject of his disgrace was still a sore one with him, but he rose from his couch among the rushes and came forward, book in hand, to stand beside Tim.

"You can do as you like, George Blake, you, and the rest of the boys, but if you drive Tim Marks away this morning you will drive me away too."

"Don't be a soft, Willie White, let the little stoopid go off about his own business, he won't be no more lonely nor forsaken than he was afore he came across we. And you was agoing to tell us about they tadpoles, and how they turns into toads and frogs when they's old enough," said George, descending to coaxing, for he was an ardent admirer of the lame pupil-teacher's superior mental attainments, and always ready to add to his own meagre stock of knowledge when it could be taken in pleasant doses such as Willie dispensed by means of his story-making faculty.

But Willie was not to be moved from his determination, and only answered quietly: "I'll stay if Tim stays."

Gathering blackness was visible on George's face, though for a moment he hesitated, and might have even consented to Tim's remaining, but for an ill-timed chirrup from a bandy-legged small boy.

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"George Blake always gives in when Willie White tells him to."

"Do I?" shouted George Blake in a towering passion now, and turning to Willie, he said with what he considered to be quite withering emphasis: "'Birds of a feather flock together.' If you prefer the company of Tim Marks to ours by all means have it. We don't want you."

To this came a feeble chorus of approbation, for George's father kept a sweet-stuff shop, and George's pockets were more than usually bulky in appearance on this particular morning, therefore it was manifestly prudent to vote on his side.

Willie White raised no further protest, but walked away by the side of Tim, his heart more sore than he would have liked to admit, by reason of this disaffection on the part of his former friends.

Perhaps Tim was scarcely more at ease, and though he was flattered and pleased to think that the lame pupil teacher had singled him out as a companion, yet behind all this was the lurking suspicion that after all Willie only desired to pity and patronise him, and that was what he especially did not want.

The two walked in silence for a little distance,

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but the charm of the morning was gone for both, and the fragrance of the hayfields was dulled, the coolness of the glittering river had ceased to make itself felt, and only the torrid sun smiting on their backs made them feel how tired they were.

"Where are you going, Tim?" inquired Willie, as Tim turned somewhat abruptly from the riverside to follow a winding field path.

"Home," replied Tim, in trenchant defiance.

"Don't go just yet, stow your basket there under the hedge, and let us go and sit under a tree by the water. I've got a book here full of pretty stories about animals, and I'll read some to you," urged Willie, too intent on his disinterested purpose of befriending Tim to observe how irksome his society was to the boy.

"Can't, Aunt Luce will want me, good mornin'," and with a careless nod, Tim hitched his basket a little higher on his back, and started up the field-path. His excuse regarding his aunt wanting him was perfectly correct, only he might have added that she usually had to want in vain.

Willie gazed after the quickly retreating figure with a dismal sense of defeat. It was evident to him that however good his intentions might have been, he had miserably failed in the two attempts

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that he had made to win the regard of lonely, neglected Tim Marks.

But the defeat was after all not so complete as his fancy painted it; and all day long Tim carried a pleasant feeling about with him because Willie White had been willing to forego the favour and friendship of the other boys in order to stand by him.

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CHAPTER VI.

THE BURNING OF WYLOE MILL.

THE scorching day was followed by a sultry evening, which deepened into a hot, airless night.

About midnight, darting streaks of lightning flashed here and there on the blue grey background of the night sky, and a distant grumble of thunder announced the approach of the coming storm.

Dark clouds grew rapidly on the western horizon, the wind rose and moaned through the pollard willows, lashing the smoothly gliding river into foam-crested curves, and making it roar in louder fury as it poured through the sluice gates of the old Wyloe Mill.

But no rain came. Only the thunder crashed and the lightning darted, until it seemed as though all the armament of the skies were in league to bring destruction and desolation to the fair-spreading fields and farms lying along the river valley.

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Presently, a wild tongue of flame shot out from the old mill, for the electric current had fired the mass of greasy half-cleaned wool then stored in the lower warerooms of the crazy old timber building, and with such fuel the conflagration grew with amazing rapidity, and the mill was in a fair way to be demolished ere any one appeared on the scene to witness its destruction.

And then, as though in penitence for the deed it had done, the storm suddenly stayed its fury, while the rain came down in sheets.

At the first cry of fire, Tim Marks was out of his bed and dressing in all haste, in order that he might be in time to see the sight. His father was not home yet, having been away at Rawnley, spending the evening in the society of the choice spirits who frequented "The Barley Mow."

This, however, was no deterrent to Tim, who, as regarded the disposal of his time and actions, was practically his own master, or would have been, but for the interference of the School Board officer.

Scudding along the road, buttoning his poor jacket as he went, and caring not one jot for the rain, which almost blinded him, Tim envied no one. All his life it had been his ambition to see a real fire,

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and now he was on the way to the attainment of his desire.

There were other people hurrying in the same direction, and anxious voices were discussing and hoping that the mill might not be an utter ruin, for poor as it was, it yet afforded employment to some two score or more of people, who would have found it difficult to gain the means of livelihood elsewhere.

But Tim, with the lack of prudence and forethought natural in a child, hoped only for a big blaze and an utter collapse of the building, so that he might "see what it looked like," and his wish was abundantly gratified. The mill was chiefly a timber building, and these timbers, worn with old age and in many parts soaked with oil, fed the flames as nothing else could have done, and by the time Tim, awed, entranced, and almost beside himself with delight, arrived upon the scene, the roof had fallen in, and one solid pyramid of fire raged heavenwards.

"My word, ain't it splendid?" he breathed, shuffling his feet in a sort of pantomimic caper.

He had spoken to no one in particular, though now the crowd had grown so that he was jostled and pushed on either side, as each new comer strove

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for vantage ground where the best view of the burning pile could be had.

"Is it you, Tim Marks?" said a voice at his elbow, and Tim, turning quickly, saw Willie White standing at his side with head and shoulders enveloped in a large sack to protect him from the rain.

"Yes, it's me," retorted Tim, and then relapsed into silence, feeling, perhaps, that the occasion was too sublime for speech.

Meanwhile, a few active spirits had formed a line to the river, and vigorously passed buckets of water along to throw on the fire, accomplishing little, saving the soaking of their own lower limbs, and the tiring of their strength. Then, when the flames were dying down for lack of fuel, the Witford fire-engine arrived, making a great noise and clatter, and clearing all before it like a whirlwind in miniature. But fires were rare in Witford and its environs, and the firemen less ready than is usual with their class, so that on this occasion, at least, they could scarcely be said to "clothe themselves with victory," seeing that the mill was in a state of utter collapse before they arrived, and pouring water on red hot cinders, although it made a great steam, could scarcely be named as an achievement of magnitude.

Willie and Tim, thrust into the background by the

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firemen, kept close to one another notwithstanding, and Tim, as the stronger and more active of the two, soon found another point of vantage for himself and his companion. It was raining still, but less heavily, and the clouds were breaking and drifting apart.

"Tim, what made you run away from me to-day?" Willie White asked, when the excitement, like the fire, had waned somewhat.

Tim shuffled uneasily whilst he meditated as to whether the occasion demanded a falsehood; but no, in the past he had always been strictly truthful where the pupil-teacher was concerned, having a dim, hazy notion that it might be the worse for him if he did not, therefore as only the pathway of strict veracity remained open for his unwilling feet to tread, he plunged into it without further ado than a grimace, which Willie did not see.

"I didn't want to go with you not then, and I didn't want you to leave them other boys to come with me. If they'd ha' let me stay with them it would have been all right enough, but seeing as they wouldn't, I felt I'd 'liefer be let alone.'" Tim drew himself up with a childish, pathetic dignity as he spoke, but when he had finished, his voice broke with a half sob, that betrayed how sorely he felt the isolation of his daily life.

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"Why is it they treat you so mean-like, Tim Marks?" the other asked, wonderingly.

"'Cos I'm poor, I expecks." There was a stratum of doubt though as to his own statement in Tim's voice as he made his reply, that did not escape the astuter perceptions of the other.

"It can't be that, Tim Marks, for there's lots of them as poor, and poorer than you. Look at Bob Finch. Why, they were in the workhouse last winter, and would be there still if it were not for Dr. Hylton's kindness in letting them live rent free, and I've heard Mrs. Finch tell my mother that often she has to put the children to bed hungry when she can't get bread enough for them all, yet the boys at school are all friendly enough with Bob, as you and I know."

"Ah, yes, but then see how bright Bob is at his books. Why it was only t'other day as master was a praising he like anything, 'cos he was such a one at his learning," replied Tim, with a palpable attempt to fence.

"Well, that isn't the case with Jimmy Cooper, for he hates school about as much as you do, and he is poor too, yet he is a regular favourite all round."

Tim wriggled and even snorted feebly, but he did not answer, only called the other's attention to the fact

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that the fire was about over, and that it might be as well, seeing how very wet they were, to be turning their steps homewards once more.

"I've got some news for you," Willie said, a little later, when they had left the crowd still surrounding the smouldering ruins, and were retracing their steps along the lane towards Prospect Place.

"What is it?" demanded Tim, wondering if it had any reference to himself, and if so, whether it was good news."

"They are going to have a surpliced choir at Winster Abbey."

"Oh." Tim's voice fell flat at that particular moment. He cared not at all for the proposed innovation, but suffered a nameless disappointment because the news was not personal.

"And, Tim, the vicar and that Mr. Tracy that comes from Yorkshire, and was going to have bought Wyloe Mill, are going to subscribe handsomely to a fund for paying the choir boys a salary." Willie's tone was eager, but Tim, still in ignorance as to the reason for its eagerness, merely answered with another listless and monosyllabic ejaculation.

"And, Tim, I'm thinking that if you apply, you stand a good chance of getting in."

"Me?" The electrified delight with which Tim

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cried out showed how clearly he now understood wherein the goodness of Willie's news lay.

"Yes, you. Why you can sing like a bird when you like, Tim, and see how nice it would be for you to go to church regularly, and have some good interest in life," Willie answered, carefully arranging the benefits of his proposition before Tim's mental vision.

"Aye, and to be paid for it too. How much a week do you reckon the screw will be, Willie?" Tim asked, eagerly, his sordid little soul only alive to the tangible good of being paid to go to church, and totally ignoring the tangible good that would accrue to himself from the regular attendance at public worship.

"I only heard this evening, or I would have come along to tell you," the pupil-teacher answered, saddened, in spite of himself, that Tim should care for only the material good.

"Are you going to join?" Tim asked, after a minute's reverie on the future possibilities.

"No. I shouldn't care to leave Holy Trinity. Master offered last year to get me into the choir at St. Mary's, but I wouldn't go."

"Why not? Why they pays handsome at St. Mary's, and at Holy Trinity you don't get nothing only tea and buns at Christmas?" Tim's voice was

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full of amazement that his friend should display so little of worldly wisdom as to be indifferent to the loaves and fishes of St. Mary's, which was the parish church of Witford.

Willie hesitated a moment, and when he did speak, there was a sound of tears in his voice. "Father's grave is just outside the choir window at Holy Trinity, and I think he'd miss me if I wasn't in my place to sing when Sunday came round; and mother feels like it too. She says when I sing better than usual that she is sure that father hears, and can pick my voice out from the others."

But Tim's only reply to this was another "Oh," of mingled amazement and incredulity, and then, Prospect Place having been reached, he turned in at the garden gate, whilst Willie White went on to his home at the bottom of the hill where the town proper began.

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CHAPTER VII.

WINSTER ABBEY.

HIDDEN by the winding of the river valley from Prospect Place and Witford, the little hamlet of Winster spread itself along both banks of the river, or hid away behind the tall trees crowding so thickly around the Abbey ruins.

The church was the best preserved part of the decaying pile, which dated back to the reign of Edward the Fourth. It had been recently restored, and was a plain yet harmonious interior, fitted with dark oak stalls, and adorned with a window of magnificent stained glass, brought from Flanders at the end of the last century.

The vicarage, separated from the Abbey church by only a narrow piece of the churchyard, was an ugly modern building with a glaring stucco front, which was doubtless a terrible eyesore to all lovers of the

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beautiful, yet, in spite of its disharmony with its surroundings, a pleasant place to live in.

It was the first Saturday in August, and the vicar, having put the finishing touches to his Sunday sermons, strolled out of his study, which was on the sunny side of the house, and joined his wife in the drawing-room.

This room was large, and boasted three windows, all of which stood wide open to catch any stray breeze that might wander that way.

"My dear, are you ready for a cup of tea?" asked the lady who was sitting by the farther window with a pile of needlework beside her.

"Most emphatically I am," retorted Mr. Greville, with a rather weary sigh, as he dropped into a big wicker chair that was unencumbered with cushions or trappings of any sort.

With a quick movement, Mrs. Greville pushed aside her work-basket, and catching up two big downy cushions, stepped over to her husband's chair with intent to make him more comfortable.

But he put out a deprecating hand, exclaiming in imploring tones: "I pray you spare me, I am already reduced to an almost melting condition, and those cushions would be the last straw."

"The last feather you mean," replied Mrs. Greville,

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with a laugh. "What an insult to even imply, that my cushions are stuffed with straw."

They were both laughing at the little joke, and Mrs. Greville was replacing the cushions in their original positions when the door opened to admit a visitor, who was closely followed by the tea-tray.

"Ah, Mr. Tracy, I have been thinking that I should have been compelled to walk over to your house this evening, and now here you are to spare me the trouble," said Mr. Greville, rising to greet his visitor.

Mr. Tracy was a man past the prime of life, and his iron-grey hair showed thin in places, indications of a baldness soon to come, but the face below the hair was young and vigorous in its aspect, and his voice had a kindly ring behind the burr of his north-country accent. He had but lately settled in Witford, but as he was a man of large capital, and enterprising withal, great things were expected of him, which expectations he had resolved not to disappoint.

"I have been to look at some cottages on the Ringwood Road, and thought I would call in on my way back. How goes the choir business?" the visitor replied, when he had been installed in a chair opposite to the vicar's, and Mrs. Greville was busy with the tea-cups.

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"It was that very choir business that seemed likely to draw me to Witford this evening. It is so difficult to get the right sort of voices. Boys in plenty we can get, many more that we want in fact, for salaried singing is a new thing in Winster, and the would-be choristers do not stop to consider whether they have any voice capacity to fit them for their position."

Mr. Tracy nodded once or twice in the slow, thoughtful manner he had when meditating, but he did not interrupt the vicar, who went on after pausing to stir his tea. "And I thought, perhaps, that we might be able to find some Witford boys who would be willing to make light of the long walk for the sake of the emolument."

"There may be some, but I am still too much of a stranger to know them. I can, however, see the schoolmaster about it. He would be sure to know if any of his scholars had voices suitable."

"It does not follow," the vicar of Winster said, with a rather pensive head-shake. "Until a piano, or failing that, a harmonium, is looked upon as an indispensable adjunct to our parochial schools, you cannot expect any schoolmaster to be a good judge of the voice capacity of his scholars."

Just then, breaking in upon the conversation of the vicar and Mr. Tracy, stilling even the pleasant

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jingle of Mrs. Greville's tea-cups, came the sound of a boy's voice singing.

The singer was hidden from sight, but the trill and sweetness of the voice brought the two gentlemen instantly to their feet, for was not this the very thing they were in want of, a singer who could really sing?

But they did not immediately rush away in search of the owner of the voice, standing rather in critical admiration of the performance, which was too studied and deliberate in its execution to be mistaken as a mere vocal outburst of internal jubilation.

Presently, the hymn ended, and then, with a hasty step, Mr. Greville left the room by the open window, crossing the lawn in search of the singer, whilst Mrs. Greville and Mr. Tracy burst into a chorus of wonder and admiration.

A moment later, and the vicar appeared again on the edge of the shrubbery, accompanied now by a small, shrinking boy, whose furtive eyes appeared glancing in every direction, as though seeking a way of escape. Yet nothing was further from Weasel Tim's thoughts just then than any desire to escape, indeed he was inwardly gloating over the success of his stratagem, for, primed by Willie White, the lame pupil-teacher, he had carefully chosen his time in order to gain himself an unprejudiced hearing from the vicar.

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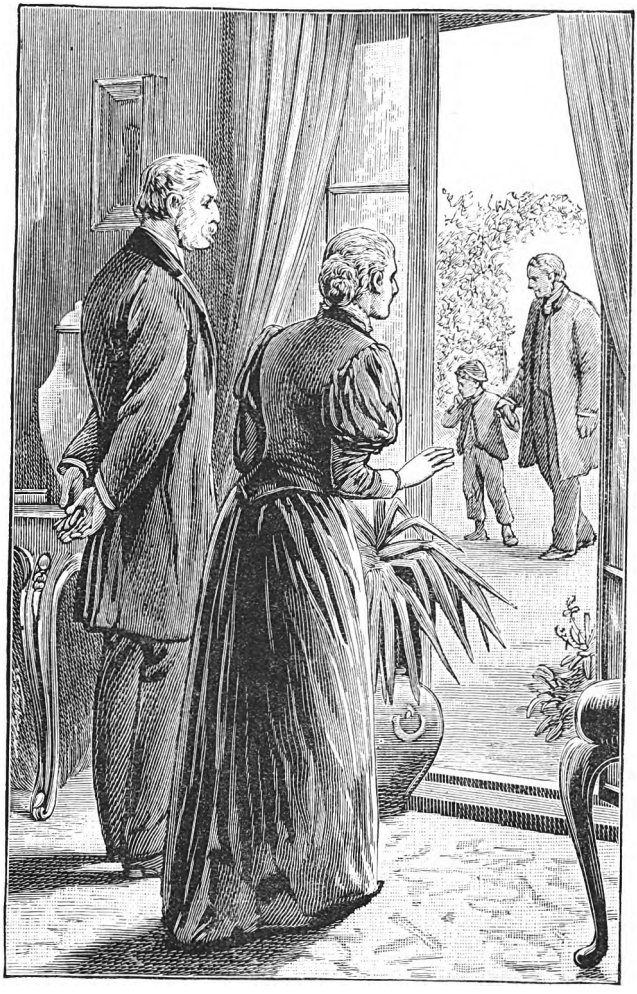

"How very unpromising to look at."—*Page 67.*

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"How very unpromising to look at," Mrs. Greville exclaimed in a low tone, as the vicar hurried across the sunny lawn, the boy slouching by his side.

Mr. Tracy's hand went up with a quick warning movement, as though he would stay further comment on the lady's part; but the mischief was done, and the disparaging words sank with bitter pain into Tim's young heart, causing his face to harden and set in defiant lines as he looked about him with his shifty, unrestful eyes.

But Mrs. Greville, totally unaware that her exclamation had fallen into other ears than those for which she had intended it, spoke pleasantly to him as he entered by the open window with the vicar, and asked where he had learned to sing so well.

"Dunno, ma'am," stammered forth Tim, abashed, not so much by his unaccustomed surroundings as by the words he had overheard.

"Can you sing anything else?" asked the vicar, his zeal momentarily abating as he surveyed the unpromising exterior of this vocal diamond in the rough.

"Yessir," came the answer with surprising promptness, as Tim pulled at his ragged forelock. He had regained sufficient ease to be mindful of his manners now, though his eyes still wandered restlessly.

"Sing to us then, will you? and see here"—it was

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Mr. Tracy who spoke, and drawing his hand from his pocket, he disclosed a shilling lying on his open palm—"if you sing as well as you did just now, I will give you this to keep."

Tim sharply surveyed the face of the speaker, and finding thereon the confirmation of the promise, gave a satisfied nod, and folding his hands, prepared to acquit himself of his task.

It was marvellous to see how the sly cunning disappeared from his face, while his eyes softened and took on a wistful pathos of expression as he piped in shrill sweet tones:

> "Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
> Lead Thou me on."

Once or twice, despite the careful coaching bestowed on him by Willie White, he stumbled over a difficult word, but never did he fail in his rendering of the tune, supplying the broken word or syllable with an inarticulate sound which yet left nothing wanting in the harmony of the whole.

"Well done, my boy, you have fairly earned the shilling!" exclaimed Mr. Tracy, well pleased, when Tim had come to the end of the hymn.

With a grin that was almost but not quite a chuckle, Tim's brown hand clutched at the coin, and then he stood motionless, awaiting further orders.

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The vicar asked him if he would come over to the choir practice to be held on the Tuesday of the following week, whereupon Tim answered as before, "Yessir."

Mrs. Greville took him out into the kitchen, and made the cook give him a mug of tea and a big slice of currant cake, whereat Tim found his manners and his tongue together again, and pulling quite furiously at his hair, he said: "Thank you kindly, ma'am, and please, ma'am, I'll get Aunt Luce to brush me up a bit before I comes again on Tuesday night, so as I won't look so—so—," but here Tim stopped in great confusion, by no means sure of the word he wanted to recall.

Mrs. Greville flushed a distressful crimson over face and brow.

"Oh, my poor boy, I had no idea that you heard my thoughtless words, and indeed they should never have been spoken; outward things are always secondary in the eyes of God, and should be so to His servants' eyes also; it is the intention that God judges."

Tim looked at her in surprise, not understanding why she should appear so distressed, yet dimly grateful to her for the emotion she had displayed on his behalf.

When he started on his return walk to Prospect

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Place, with the shilling tucked away in the safest pocket of his ragged knickerbockers, he was in a state of restful satisfaction with himself and the world generally, only again and again the wonder crossed his mind as to just what Mrs. Greville meant when she said that God judged the intentions of people.

But he dismissed the subject presently, as quite too abstruse for his powers of thinking out, and took to running races with his shadow, as the sun sunk to the westward behind him.

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CHAPTER VIII.

DISAPPOINTMENT.

ON the following Tuesday evening, Tim appeared a much improved edition of Saturday's unkempt and furtively staring boy. It was noticeable that the other boys assembled in the school-room for the bi-weekly practice, seemed disposed to draw away from the new comer, but then the rural boy is proverbially shy, and indisposed to the forming of hasty friendships, and Tim, on his part, was too over-awed by the strangeness of his position to venture on any overtures of acquaintance with the dozen or so of shock-headed juveniles, only one or two of whom he knew by name even.

The vicar was present to conduct, whilst Mrs. Greville played the harmonium, and from a shadowy corner Mr. Tracy beamed on the little band of singers, whilst ever and anon his hand jingled some odd coins in his pocket with a pleasant suggestive-

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ness that made the embryo choristers redouble their endeavours to give satisfaction.

It was very sordid of them of course to sing the better because they hoped for reward, but it was only human nature, the human nature that was theirs by inheritance from their fathers and mothers; so that they were but following their instincts in trying to please the kindly northern manufacturer, who sat so quietly listening in the corner.

The practice was a great success, and Tim received some warm words of praise from the vicar and his wife, words that made his heart beat so fast that he could scarcely find breath to stammer forth his incoherent thanks.

If heaven was going to be as nice as a choir-practice he told himself, it really couldn't be such a bad thing to die after all, that is of course if you were sure of getting there.

The uncertainty of his own title to a place in the eternal choir sobered him a little as he raced across the dusky fields, and jumping the deep ditch, where the footbridge was broken, made his way into the sombre shadows of Maggot's Grove.

A gentle rain began to fall as he climbed the steep woodland pathway, and every leaf receiving its quota of moisture promptly deposited a part of

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the same upon Tim's shoulders as he passed under the overhanging boughs. It was not very pleasant, and by the time he emerged on the other side of the plantation he was very damp indeed, and set out to run the remainder of the distance to Prospect Place in order the sooner to be out of the rain.

A mowing machine had been at work in the oat-field that day, and the oats lay in long even swathes all across the field, while the wind moaned fitfully in the tall hedgerow, as though in requiem for the dying corn.

Most boys would have been afraid in the weird, wet darkness of the lonely hill field; but Tim had been out with his father for too many nights in field and wood to be nervous, in fact he rather liked the silence and the solitude, and only ran because he did not like the wet.

He slackened speed when he reached the river, and even stopped to gaze curiously at the tall scaffold poles and piles of bricks and timber which already occupied the site of the old Wyloe Mill. A new mill was to be built there, was indeed rising rapidly, thanks to the energy and capital of Mr. Tracy, whose enterprises always moved with characteristic rapidity.

As Tim paused to look at the progress already

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made, his eye was caught by something which looked like machinery, piled up and covered over, standing close beside an old stable, which fronted the new building on the other side of the pathway; with boyish curiosity he turned towards it, and was poking and prying with intent to discover its real nature, when suddenly a rough hand seized him from behind, and a harsh voice accosted him.

"Hullo! youngster! What be you a doing here?"

"No harm, Mister Sims, so you needn't be for holding me so tight, as though you was afraid as I was a basket of eggs and you might drop me," retorted Tim, who, though startled at first, had been quick to recognise the voice as belonging to Eli Sims, the builder's foreman, who was taking a last look round to see that all was right for the night.

"I'm none so sure o' that. 'Where boys is, there mischief is to be looked for,' is my motto, and so you'll p'raps just tell me where you've been, where you're going, and anything else as may be interestin' to me just now."

"I've been to Winster Abbey choir-practice, and I'm going home now, and as it is a little too damp to make it pleasant standing about, I should feel quite obliged if you'd let me be a moving on," Tim replied; but Eli Sims did not loose his grip.

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"One story is good until another is told, and how am I to know that you've been to Winster at all, when it's just as likely that you've been trapping rabbits in Maggot's Grove."

Tim, with difficulty, repressed a shiver, as he thought of how often he had been in Maggot's Grove for that very purpose, and had come stealing along past the old mill with the dead rabbits in a bag upon his back. But his tone was one of cheerful indifference as he answered with a laugh: "Well, I haven't got any rabbits now at any rate. You can feel in my pockets if you like. You'll find a threepenny bit as Mr. Tracy gived me to-night for singing higher than Jim Rowls in the *Gloria*, but there ain't much else."

Eli Sims slowly relaxed his hold, growling, as he did so: "I s'pose I'll have to let you go this time, though what with the likes o' your lot and that fellow at 'The Barley Mow,' the gentry hereabouts won't have a bird left to shoot by the time the first comes."

But Tim was free, and had heard as much as he cared to, apparently, for he darted off like the wind, and the sound of his footsteps could be heard in rapid retreat along the lane.

He burst in at home in a breathless condition,

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and with his face whiter than usual behind the tan and the freckles.

"You're late, Tim. Were you singing all the time?" inquired Aunt Luce, rising to get him some supper from the cupboard.

"A'most, and then Mister Tracy and the vicar talked to us, and Mister Tracy, he gave me a threepenny bit, 'cos I sang well; but where's father, Aunt Luce?" Tim asked, with a look round for signs of his father's return from work.

"He's stepped down to the forge to get his scythe handle tightened. You'd best be abed before he comes back, for he isn't over pleased that you should be a mixin' up with the gentry like this by going over to the Abbey to sing," replied his aunt, with a petulant ring in her voice, as she stepped about the poor bare room, straightening it for the night.

"It be a good job for he that I were at Winster to-night," Tim answered between the mouthfuls of the supper he was eating.

"Why?" inquired his aunt, sharply.

But Tim did not choose to tell her, there being but little confidence indulged in between this ill-assorted family of three. He did make haste to finish his supper, however, and by the time Simon Marks returned from the blacksmith's he had crept away to his

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bed, where he lay waiting until his father should come, not daring to go to sleep for fear that he should fail to rouse when his father came upstairs.

The man was tired, and more surly than his wont. Tim could hear him growling and grumbling in the room below, and the petulant whine of the aunt's voice, when she answered him. Then Mrs. Giles's steps sounded on the stairs, and after a little lumbering about and shutting of doors, Simon Marks came up slowly and heavily.

"Father," cried Tim, in a hissing, penetrating whisper, as his father stumbled forward into the room.

"What now?" growled the man, in a discouraging tone. He thought that Tim was merely bubbling over with some childish confidences concerning his evening at Winster; and, as the choir practice found no favour in his eyes, he desired to hear nothing whatever about it.

"It's all over the place about they partridges and squiddies," burst forth Tim, still in that same hissing whisper which was much more forceful than ordinary speech.

"Hey, what?" exclaimed Simon Marks, considerably startled, though he did not care to show it.

"It was Eli Sims as said it. He as is foreman

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of the men building the new Wyloe Mill. He collared me to-night as I was coming home, and asked me where I'd been, tried to make out as I'd been after birds or rabbits, and seemed quite sorry to find I hadn't, and he said that pretty soon there wouldn't be nothing left to shoot at by the time the first of September came, if it wasn't stopped, and he said it was you and the man at 'The Barley Mow.'" Tim's story came to an abrupt ending by reason of his want of breath, and Simon Marks burst into a harsh, unpleasant laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha, he bain't far out there neither, for feathers and fur *is* getting scarcer in this part o' the world just at the present; but I don't know as we want Eli Sims dandering after us whichever way we turns just now; the more by reason as he is own cousin once removed to Constable Norris, and his wife's got relations in the force too;" and Simon Marks, stripping off his coat, sat down upon the bed in his shirt sleeves to ruminate awhile.

Tim cowered under the bed-clothes and shivered. He was too young and too ignorant to understand the extent of his father's law-breaking, but he knew that the big policeman, named Jim Norris, hated his father, and would do him an ill turn if he could. Eli Sims, too, had a reputation for looking sharply

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after questionable people, and Tim never doubted that sooner or later between the two of them his father would come to grief.

"I think, Tim, my boy, that for the next few days at any rate I shall have to be hookey-walker," said Simon Marks, after a somewhat lengthy period of rumination.

"Will you take the tins?" Tim asked, knowing well that hookey-walker was synonymous for on the tramp.

"Ye-es," said his father in slow reflection, "and seeing as how it is holiday time, I think that I can't do better than take you. You'd be out of mischief at any rate, and there'd be no danger of your letting cats out of bags, or doing any silly thing as you might have to be sorry for afterwards."

"Me?" echoed Tim, in blank, bitter disappointment.

"Yes, I ain't got half a dozen boys, have I?" inquired Mr. Marks, with a sort of grim facetiousness that sat strangely upon him, gloomy and taciturn as was his wont.

"But you won't be back by Sunday, will you father?" Tim asked in a trembling tone.

"Rayther not, I should say, and not for a week o' Sundays if things is at all likely to be trouble-

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some," replied Mr. Marks, still in that tone of cheerful ferocity that made Tim shiver in spite of himself.

"But I'm to sing in the choir on Sunday at the Abbey, and wear a surplice, and be paid," protested Tim, with bitter vehemence.

"Wear a what?" asked his father, his ear caught by the unaccustomed word.

"A surplice, a sort of white gown over my clothes, like the vicar wears to preach in, and, oh, father, I do want to go so much." Tim's voice broke in a sob, and then he dived under the bed-clothes to choke back another.

Simon Marks sat silent for a moment; somewhere down in his heart there slumbered fatherly affection; but at the best it was scanty and hard to be got at, and Tim was looked upon as something between a nuisance and a convenience.

"It ain't no use for to be making a fuss, boy. I would leave you if I could; but it's likely some queer questions will be asked, which you'd find main difficult to answer, and they gentry over to Winster would be always pumping you in their clever, innercent sort of manner, and you'd be making a clean breast afore ever you knowed what you was up to, so you'll have to come along of I, and leave the singing and the surplice till such time as this

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'ere air gets healthy enough to suit my delicate constitution."

Tim knew his father well enough to realise that this decision was final, and that there existed no possibility of appeal, therefore he made no further protest, only hid under the bed-clothes crying pitifully the while, and with no hope of comfort or consolation in his grief.

Sleep stole on him unawares in the midst of his crying, and he slumbered peacefully enough until the dawn crept chilly and damp over the river meadows.

His father woke him then, standing fully dressed by the bedside, and looking as though he had not been in bed at all, as indeed he had not, contenting himself with a hasty nap on the outside of his bed.

"Get ready, sharp, it's time we was moving," he said in a low tone, then turned, and went downstairs, his stockinged feet making a dull creaking on the ancient, worm-eaten steps.

Tim huddled himself into his garments in a dismal, woe-begone frame of mind, the burden of his disappointment lay very heavy on his heart, and his mental outlook was as grey, and damp, and dreary as the wet August morning. But he made haste to

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join his father downstairs, knowing well that it would not be prudent to keep him waiting.

Simon Marks had raked open the pile of ashes on the hearth, and laid thereon some dried furze branches, through which already a thin blue smoke was curling, and which leapt into flame as Tim knelt down before it, lacing his heavy shoes, and furtively rubbing his tear-smarting eyes.

"Ain't you going to call Aunt Luce?" asked Tim, noting how quietly his father was hurrying forward his preparations for departure, and thinking with a sudden revival of hope that perhaps his aunt would talk his father into leaving him at home.

But the rekindled hope was doomed to speedy extinction, as Simon Marks replied that he certainly did not intend enlightening Mrs. Giles as to his sudden and unexpected journey.

He had little appetite for the slice of bread and bacon his father thrust into his hand, but the tin can of tea, warmed over the now blazing furze branches, was nearly half emptied before he resigned it to his father.

They set forth then, each with a burden of jingling tin pots and pans slung over his back, for Simon Marks always kept his stock-in-trade ready for an emergency like the present.

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Leaving the house by the garden gate into the high road, they turned their steps towards Witford, which lay wrapped in slumber and the grey river mist, as they passed along the silent, echoing streets, the low murmuring of the pendent tinware sounding like the faint jingle of bells in the distance.

They had crossed the entire length of the town, and had reached the football field at the farther side, when there came a hurry of soft footfalls behind them, and a rush of panting breath.

"The dog!" exclaimed Simon Marks, stopping to pat his faithful mongrel. "I believe that critter would foller me anywhere!"

Tim was not very wise, could not even understand his own mental reasoning, indeed, but there came to him then a resolution not to be outdone in faithfulness and devotion by a dog, and turning his back on his regrets and happiness, he stepped along by his father's side out into the open country beyond Witford, with a determination to make the best of things, and to cry no more for the good beyond his reach.

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CHAPTER IX.

ON THE TRAMP.

BY the time that the sun had risen and had driven the mists from the low-lying meadows, Tim began to feel a longing for that same bread and bacon from which he had previously turned away.

"Are you going to stop for breakfast or anything, father?" he ventured, after a time, when the gnawings of hunger became very pronounced indeed.

"Nothing short of dinner, if I knows it," replied Simon Marks, adding as an afterthought: "but if so be as you are craving, why here's the bread and bacon as you couldn't eat awhile ago."

Tim grabbed eagerly at the package done up in dingy paper, which his father pulled out of his

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jacket pocket and handed to him. He had often been hungry before, but this morning the chill air had made him ravenous, and he fell to at his before-rejected breakfast with great enjoyment and zest, and as he ate he began to feel more cheerful and resigned to the absence from home that his father's will had made necessary.

It was easier to walk after that small refreshment, and, as the road was a strange one, Tim began to look about him with considerable curiosity. They had passed few villages since leaving Witford, their route being a cross-country one, and the houses very scattered, or clustered at a distance from the roadside.

Towards noon, however, they halted at a little roadside inn at the foot of a long, steep hill. There was no village to be seen, and no other house even, only some low, thatched barns and piggeries clustering closely around the lonely public-house.

There was a big elm tree shadowing the horse-trough in front of the inn, and Tim was glad to deposit his burden of tins on a bench, and curl himself down in the shade of the elm tree to rest awhile, for he was already footsore and weary from the long distance tramped since morning.

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Simon Marks had entered the house and was already driving a brisk bargain with the landlady, bartering his tinwares for dinner for himself and Tim.

"Well, I don't mind saying I'll have that kettle, the more so as one of my others runs out; still I'd rather have money," Mrs. Pratley said, after some considerable haggling over the kettle.

She came to the door then, and stood shading her eyes with her hand, and looking at Tim, who, stretched on the grass by the horse-trough, was meditating drowsily, with his eyes fixed on the patches of blue sky showing between the interlacing boughs of the big tree.

"Is that your boy?" she asked, in a sharp tone.

"Yes, it be," responded Simon Marks, with careless indifference.

"I don't like the looks of he," decided the landlady, not taking the trouble to lower her voice in the least. "He looks too sharp to be honest."

"His schoolmaster don't seem to reckon as how he's in any danger of getting on too fast," replied Simon Marks.

Mrs. Pratley tossed her head. She was very fond

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of hearing herself talk, and never let any opportunity pass without airing her opinions as much as possible. "That only serves to show as how I'm right, and if you don't have trouble along o' he afore he's ten years older my name is not Sarah Jane Pratley."

"May be," said Simon Marks, in the same indifferent tone; "but I say, missus, is that dinner pretty nigh ready? We've been on the tramp since five o'clock this morning, and it ain't easy to remember what we had for breakfast by now."

Mrs. Pratley took the hint, and bustled back into her kitchen to give an eye to the dinner, while Simon Marks lounged in the doorway, and Tim lay still on the grass, only now he was no longer placidly gazing skywards in dreamy content with his noontide rest. Instead, he was winking as hard as he could to keep back the tears which Mrs. Pratley's harsh judgment had called forth. It seemed so dreadfully unfair to his mode of reasoning, that every one should decide that he was a bad lot at the very outset, thus giving him no chance at all unhampered by prejudice.

Presently, Mrs. Pratley reappeared carrying a tray, which she set down on a table outside the door. There were two well-filled plates of Irish stew and

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potatoes upon the tray, and the savoury smell reaching Tim as he lay on the grass, banished for a little his bitter reflections, and sent him to his dinner with a thankful spirit.

"Where be you a making for now?" queried the landlady, when she came to take in the empty dinner plates.

"Over yon," replied Simon Marks, with a vague wag of his head towards that part of the world lying over the hill.

"Oh, Swanley way, I suppose. Well, you won't do much in your line there. Now, if you turned round and went back across country to Witford, the people are a deal more prosperous that way, and can afford to spend their money on pots and pans, but round here it's struggle enough to get bread to eat, and little to spare for aught beside."

"We came through Witford this morning. It looks a slow sort of place," answered Simon Marks, whilst Tim wondered mightily why his father did not say that they lived there.

"Slow, did you say?" echoed Mrs. Pratley, in disdainful astonishment. "It's pretty evident you don't know much about it, or you'd never call it that; a sight o' business is done there as I know well, having

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a sister living there, Widow White they calls her, and she keeps a little general shop at West End."

"Has she got one son named Willie?" cried Tim, starting up excitedly, and seeing nothing of his father's warning frown.

"La, yes, do you know he, my dear?" asked Mrs. Pratley, forgetting for the moment her dislike to Tim's outward appearance.

But Tim had no chance of replying, for his father hit him a driving blow on the head, which sent him staggering out into the road, and answered for him.

"Silly loon, he don't know what he be a talking about. The Willie White as he knows lives out Chipping Starock way, and is a squinted-eyed fellow as is subject to fits," said Simon Marks, in a very unpleasant tone of voice.

"Which ain't the case with my nephew in Witford, who is as well set up and nice to look at as you'd be likely to find in a day's march," replied the landlady, boastfully, ignoring the fact of Willie's lameness.

Simon Marks growled some inarticulate response, and, having paid his reckoning with the particular kettle agreed upon, shouldered his burden of wares, and calling to Tim to gather up his share of the

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stock-in-trade, moved slowly off to commence the ascent of the hill.

Half-stunned still from the effects of the blow, Tim walked slowly toward the green by the horse-trough, where he had put down his tins, and began to string them over his shoulders once more.

"Say now, does your father knock you about much?" asked the landlady, following him and speaking in a tone pretty equally made up of curiosity and kindness.

Tim turned towards her and was on the point of pouring out hot words of indignation against his father, and of self-justification also, when like a flash there came to him the remembrance of his determination to be true to his father, and to stick by him through thick and thin, and not to be beaten in devotion by his father's dog, which, poor animal, had for its reward little beyond kicks and cuffs, and hard living generally.

For a moment he hesitated, but that was all, and changing the resentful expression of his face to one of sullen stupidity, he said: "He ain't no worse than other fathers be, I reckon."

"But what made him take savage all of a sudden then do you suppose?" asked Mrs. Pratley, with intent to wheedle.

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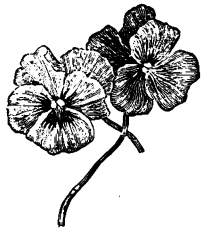
"I dunno," replied Tim, and truthfully enough too, for he was in reality greatly puzzled at his father's sudden outbreak.

"La, now!" exclaimed Mrs. Pratley, revolving yet another query; but before she could give it speech Tim had got his burden swung into position, and with a civil "Good day, ma'am," had started after his father.



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CHAPTER X.

NEWS FROM WITFORD.

THE wanderings of Tim and his father had lasted for weeks, and the last days of August had arrived.

One Saturday evening, two days before the close of the month, they came to a halt at a little out-of-the-way village nestling under the hills about twenty miles from Witford as the crow flies, though the distance would be considerably greater by road or rail.

The stock of tins had been sold out long before this, and a fresh lot bought, which last were also rapidly diminishing, and the wearing apparel of the man and boy was reduced to the last stage

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of shabbiness. Tim was thinner than ever, and brown as a berry from exposure to the sun and weather; but there was a shrunken, bowed look about Simon Marks that was pitiful to see; and when they reached the little inn on the outskirts of the village, he sank on the bench standing just outside the door, too tired and worn out to go even a step farther.

The dog lay down beside him, seemingly exhausted also, and lolled his tongue from his mouth panting with heat, for the evening was sultry, and dark storm-clouds were piling themselves in the western sky, blotting out the crimson glories of the sunset.

But Tim was anxious to be off on an exploring expedition, and slipping the bundle of pots and pans from his back, dropped them on the seat by his father, and started off to see for himself what kind of a place Shipworth was. The inn stood at the entrance to the village, but most of the houses were built around a long strip of green, at the farther end of which stood the church, almost hidden by the tall trees clustering round it.

There was not much of interest to Tim in the place, and his thin, inquisitive face and sly manners

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made one or two of the more suspicious of the villagers tell him to be off, and go about his business. After a time he returned to the inn, to find his father still sitting on the bench by the door.

"We'll stay here a day or so," said Simon Marks, feebly. "I feel a bit queer somehow, and a couple of days on the quiet may put me right again."

"All right: what's for supper?" Tim asked. His father's evident weakness was not unnoticed by him, but he only put it down to the long, weary tramp over hot dusty roads, and never dreamed that his father was ill.

"There's some bread and bacon as you can have, and they've got some hot tea inside," the man said, with a slight movement of his head in the direction of the house behind him.

"Ain't you thinking of supper?" Tim asked, in some surprise.

"I ain't to say craving for food just now, but I wouldn't say no to a pull at your tea when you have it," Simon Marks said, resting his head against the wall and shutting his eyes.

Tim went off for the tea, and returned with a steaming quart pot of the fragrant beverage, which

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he shared with his father, throwing scraps of his bread and bacon to the dog.

Presently, some villagers strolled up and commenced a conversation with the landlord, who, in white apron and shirt sleeves, stood taking the air on his doorstep.

"Queer business, that finding of poached game at Rawnley," said the landlord, when the weather, the crops, and politics had received their due amount of attention.

"What is it?" asked a very fat man, who was a grocer in a small way of business.

"Haven't you seen the *Witford Gazette* this week?" the landlord said, and turning back into the house, he fetched the paper from the table in the bar, and began to search the columns for the particular item he wanted.

At the first mention of Rawnley, Tim had instantly pricked up his ears, and then looked eagerly at his father; but Simon Marks still sat with his eyes closed, and only by the quiver of his eyelids and firmer compression of the mouth did Tim know him to be awake.

"It's as queer a business as ever I heard of," said the landlord, still searching for the place. "Oh, here it is, read it to us, Philip Turner," he went on,

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holding the paper towards a young man in a well-worn cricketing suit, who considered himself the champion athlete of the village.

With some faint show of bashful demur, he took the paper and commenced to read.

"RAWNLEY.—This little village has, during the past week, become the scene of considerable excitement, owing to the finding of a large hoard of hares, partridges, and rabbits, which were being preserved in a frozen condition, and stored in the cellar of an inn called 'The Barley Mow.' On Tuesday evening a portion of the premises was discovered to be in flames, and the neighbours, among whom were several members of the police force, at once volunteered all possible aid in preserving the building from total destruction. The landlord of the place, however, instead of appearing grateful for the efforts of the helpers, strongly resented what he called their interference, saying that as he was fully insured he would rather that his house should burn to the ground. This strange conduct on the part of the man raised the suspicions of the police, who at once instituted a vigorous search through the blazing building, and were rewarded by finding an underground cave or cellar well packed with game, which had been frozen in order to preserve it until such time as it might

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be prudent to send it off to the London markets. It is needless to add that the landlord was promptly arrested, and now a search is being instituted for a Witford man, a noted poacher of long standing, who disappeared from the neighbourhood some weeks ago in company with his son, and has not since been heard of."

"A rum go, that. I never heard of the dodge of freezing birds afore," said the fat grocer, who had been listening, open-mouthed, to the reading.

"No, but it wasn't half a bad idea," retorted the landlord, "because, don't you see, the birds could be picked up quietly by twos and threes, and frozen, and so a lot might be collected before the keepers even suspected as there was any poaching going on."

"Why, to hear you talk, any one would think that you had been going in for a little business of that kind on your own account, Mr. Paxton," said Philip Turner, with a laugh.

The landlord turned sharply. "I ain't such an out-and-out idiot as to go in for law-breaking. I like to be able to draw a constable a quart of ale and look him in the face when I does it, which mightn't be the case if I'd got my cellar littered up with a pack of frozen game!"

At this the company laughed, Tim joining in the

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merriment also, in order that no lurking suspicion might point to him and his father as being the missing man and boy mentioned in the newspaper account.

But Simon Marks did not laugh, and looking at him, Tim was startled to find that he had gone off in a kind of faint or swoon.

With a cry, he rushed to his side, and the attention of the others being drawn to the pair, help was speedily rendered, and Simon Marks restored to consciousness again.

When he was able to sit upright on the bench and to talk again, he said that he thought he would go at once to bed, as the long day of tramping in the close heat had made him queer.

"I'll help you to get there. Just you lean on me," said Philip Turner, seeing how tottering and feeble the man was when he rose from his seat and essayed to walk.

But Simon Marks would have none of his aid, contenting himself with the support of Tim's shoulder.

The room they were to occupy was on the ground floor behind the bar, a bare, cupboard-like place, but a seeming paradise to the sick poacher, as he dropped wearily on to the hard bed.

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"Belike you'll feel better by now?" queried Tim, anxiously, when his father was settled on the bed.

"Belike I may, but I dunno. I've had a feeling over me the last few days as if I be come near to the end of myself, as though my clock had pretty near stopped, you know," Simon said, in a dull, heavy tone.

"Father, be you agoing to die?" Tim asked, with fear and amazement in his voice.

"I shouldn't wonder; but don't you go for to be making a fuss, and sending for a doctor, it would only make the landlord ask a lot of questions about where we comed from, and such. If my time has come, not all the doctors in the world could keep me alive, and I'd sooner go quiet than have a lot of fuss made."

Here, the man paused, and Tim began to cry bitterly, not loudly that might attract attention and bring about the very state of things the father was anxious to avoid, but with the repressed, smothered emotion that shook him from head to foot as he knelt down by the bed.

"Don't take on so, boy; belike I'm not so near gone as I think, but it's best to be on the safe side, and there's things as I wants to say to you, so as you may know what to do."

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"Yes, father, say on, I'll listen careful," answered Tim, forcing his grief to the background, whilst he bent his energies towards the task of storing up his father's last words.

"If I'm took, you're not to let on who we are, or where we come from. Say we're Londoners if you like, or make out as we've tramped so long that you don't remember where we do come from."

"But Aunt Luce——" began Tim, when his father stopped him, impatiently.

"Your Aunt Luce 'll know soon enough. You can tell her when you get home again, only you mustn't go home yet; not till after the Quarter Sessions are over, and the affair of 'The Barley Mow' has been forgotten, or may be some busy folks will be for clapping you into prison, and sending you to a reformatory for a few years." Simon Marks paused again. He seemed to be growing drowsy, and inclined to slumber, and seeing this, Tim took heart again, arguing that if his father had a good sleep he might be better when he awoke.

"There's more, but I can't say it now. I'll tell you to-morrow," the man said, and the last words had hardly left his lips than his eyes closed, and he began to slumber.

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For a long time, Tim sat by the bedside watching; but he, also, was weary with his day's tramping in the heat, and almost before he knew it, he had sunk into a curled heap on the foot of the bed, and was drifting into unconsciousness.

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CHAPTER XI.

TIM'S COMFORTERS.

THE daylight had fully come, although the day was yet young, when Tim, awakening from his sleep, unrolled from the uncomfortable heap in which he found himself, and sat upright on the bed, rubbing his eyes.

When he had fallen asleep on the previous night, the house had been noisy with the sounds of people coming and going in the bar, and the loud talking and laughter of the customers. But this morning the silence was so profound and intense, that it almost made his ears ache, and he turned quickly to see if his father was still asleep. But the silence of the house found its centre and embodiment in the quiet form resting on that humble bed, for Simon Marks had taken his last long journey and Tim was fatherless. Trembling with fear and as yet scarcely sure that he had reason for his belief, he reached out his hand and

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touched the one that lay so still on the coarse, white sheet. But it was cold to his touch, and with a wild cry of mingled sorrow and terror, Tim pulled open the door and rushed from the room.

The people of the house came quickly about him, demanding why it was he made such outcry and lamentation; but the power of speech seemed to have deserted him, and he could only point to the room whence he had fled, wringing his hands the while in the hopeless abandon of grief. They went then to where the body of his father lay, and a moment later some one rushed away in search of a doctor, though Tim knew instinctively that no doctor could bring that pulseless clay to a semblance of life again.

The people of the inn were very kind to him during the week that followed, although they plied him with questions concerning his former life, until he felt as though he should be compelled to run away to avoid answering them. But the remembrance of his father's last request had effectually sealed the boy's lips to any mention of his past, and his only reply to any and every query was that "they had tramped."

Confronted at every turn with this monotonous reiteration, the questioners grew weary of their task, and some went far enough to say that he must be daft, or something of an imbecile, not to know who he was,

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or whence he came. Others, with warmer hearts in their bosoms, said that the suddenness of his bereavement had stunned him; and foremost among these kindly pitying souls was the landlady of the inn. When the day of the funeral came, and Tim, in company with the landlord, was to follow his father's coffin to its resting-place in the churchyard, the good woman brought out from some hidden store a black jacket which had belonged to her own son, who had but lately died.

"Here, laddie, put this on; may be, it'll comfort you years hence to remember that you had decent black to wear at your father's graveside," she said, dashing away the tears which the sight of the jacket had called forth. And Tim, scarcely knowing what he did, put the jacket on, and then stepped out into the sunshine by the side of the landlord, to walk to the churchyard. He had often seen funerals before, and he remembered quite well how when Willie White's father had been buried at Holy Trinity, he had watched the ceremony from a remote corner of the churchyard, and heard Willie's sobs, and seen the strained, white face of the widow, as the earth fell with a mournful thud on to the coffin below.

He was thinking of it now as he stood by his father's grave, and the undertaker's men were letting

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their burden down out of sight into the place prepared for it. He was not crying; there seemed to be no tears left to shed, and the hot September sunshine glaring full on his back made him feel sick and dizzy after the last few days of lingering in a house. But the clergyman had reached his final "Amen," and the sexton, intent on completing his task with all possible dispatch, was already advancing to commence his work of filling in the grave, when a cold nose was thrust into Tim's hand with a quick movement, and a stumpy tail beat a sympathetic tattoo against his legs. He had forgotten all about the dog, and this sudden reminder completely broke down his poor little stock of self-control. Flinging himself down upon the grass by the side of his father's old companion, he burst into a pitiful fit of sobbing; for he was only a child, and though his father had never been very kind to him, yet was he his father, and now that he was gone, Tim was desolate, saving for the dog.

The landlord waited a few minutes for Tim to rise and join him, then finding that the boy still lay sobbing by the side of the dog, he walked away by himself, for it was nearly the hour to milk his cow, and he had already spent more time and money on these unprofitable customers than altogether pleased

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him. But when his wife heard how he had left the orphan she upbraided him roundly for his callousness, and herself hastened away with all speed to comfort the poor boy and bring him back to his supper in her kitchen.

That night, Tim and the dog slept together, and the next day he announced his intention of once more starting off "on tramp."

"But you can't carry all that lot of tins yourself, boy; why, they are as much as you can lift, I should say," urged the good woman, who, in her heart of hearts, would have liked to have kept Tim to mother, in place of the son she had loved and lost.

"I'll have to be leaving most on 'em to pay for what I've had to eat, and all that," Tim answered.

"But you're ower young to fend for yourself; I should say you ought to be at school at your age, instead of earning your own living."

At the mention of school, Tim inwardly shivered; but he made no comment beyond saying that he had his bread to earn and must get it as best he could. It is possible that the landlady might have raised even more strenuous objections to Tim's departure, might even have prevented it altogether, had it not been for her husband's unwillingness to in any way entertain the idea of giving the fatherless boy a home.

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In the early morning of the day following, Tim started to begin life on his own account; he would have started on the afternoon of the day before, but the good woman would not let him, and when at last she was compelled to part with him she cried heartily, mopping up her tears with her ample, white apron, telling him over and over again that he was to come back that way if he could not sell his tins. Her warm friendship and kindly sympathy stirred Tim's heart to its deepest depths, and he went away feeling that the world was not such a lonely place after all, seeing that it contained a woman with such a motherly heart in her bosom.

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CHAPTER XII.

IN SIGHT OF HOME.

FOR three days Tim wandered, bartering a tin or two for food, and sleeping under ricks or in outhouses, wherever he could find a bundle of straw that would serve to keep him warm; for although the days were hot and sunny, the nights were chill with a touch of frost in them. For lack of other companionship he would talk to his dog, and though the poor animal could not answer back, there was sufficient intelligence in its sympathy to save the boy from a sense of utter forlornness.

But on the evening of the third day he chanced to fall in with a travelling tinker, possessed of a small caravan, drawn by a lean, dispirited-looking horse, and driven by the tinker's wife, a bright-looking woman not yet out of her teens, who seemed to understand the art of taking life easy, if one might judge

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from the placid content of her rosy face. Tim encountered them on the turnpike road about fifteen miles from Witford, towards which place they were journeying. He was hungry and tired, for his little store of money was spent, and no one seemed to want a tin saucepan or kettle in return for the supper he craved; and he had tramped many a weary mile since starting in the morning.

"Hullo! small boy; where be you going with all they pots and pans?" called out the tinker's wife, catching sight of Tim lounging in tired fashion on the strip of dusty grass that bordered the highway.

"I want to find a place to sleep in, ma'am, and I haven't made enough to buy me a supper yet," answered Tim, coming to the side of the van, while the horse drew to a standstill, and hung down its head as though it wanted to go to sleep.

"What! are you at work on your own account?" she asked, with a ripple of amused laughter, bending down from her perch in front of the caravan to look into the boy's face, which was a marvel of tan and freckles, and even less prepossessing than usual by reason of its worn, haggard expression.

"Yes, ma'am; is there anything in my line as might suit you?" And Tim jingled his tins with insinuating suggestiveness, in the hope of finding a

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purchaser whose benevolence might even at this eleventh hour provide him with the wherewithal to break his fast.

"Poor little chap! have you spent all your money?" the laughter had disappeared from her face now, and its expression was kind and pitiful.

"Yes, ma'am; I didn't have only ninepence ha'penny when I started."

"And how long ago was that?"

"Three days, ma'am, since I left Shipworth." Tim was finding the cross-examination rather trying, and his restless eyes wandered from the woman to the neat little house on wheels before which she was sitting, and from thence to the lean horse standing motionless in the shafts.

"Mike!" shouted the woman, turning her head to call to some one inside the caravan; "Mike! Are you awake?"

A man's gruff voice answered her, and a moment later the tinker appeared at the open upper half of the door.

"See here, Mike," said she, "this little chap wants to sell his tins; shall we give him five bob for the lot, and hang 'em round the van, they'd make a fine show when the sun shone?"

"Ain't worth it; half-a-crown is a sight nearer the

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ticket," he retorted, running his eye rapidly over Tim's stock-in-trade.

Again the woman laughed in her happy, amused fashion; but when she spoke there was pleading and force in her tone. "But he's such a little chap, Mike, and it's all he's got."

"'Umph!" ejaculated the man; but there was a distinct sound of yielding in his voice, and after another lengthened survey of Tim and his burden, he asked: "Say, younker! will you take five bob for the lot?"

"Rather!" exclaimed Tim, to whom five shillings seemed a fortune.

"And what'll you do with it?" asked the tinker's wife.

"Keep it to buy food with," answered the boy, readily, thinking with delight of the many good feeds he could have when he became possessed of so much money.

"But when you have spent it all, what then?" she asked.

Tim paused reflectively; he had not faced such a contingency, for the faith of childhood concerns itself but little about the future, and no idea of replenishing his little stock-in-trade in order to ensure funds for future needs had occurred to him.

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"I hadn't thought about it," he admitted, beginning to feel that trading and business might, perhaps, hold problems as difficult of solving as even sums in simple subtraction, and that the labour of earning his bread might present as unpleasant a front as the task of learning to write his name.

"So it seems, and if you go throwing that five shillings away on bread and butter you'll have to starve in a ditch presently, or find yourself in the workhouse. How would you like to take a situation, now?"

"Lor, 'Lizer! what are you up to now?" put in the man, looking at his buxom wife in much astonishment.

"You'll see if you wait long enough, Mike," she retorted, then turned to Tim, awaiting his reply.

"I should like it, ma'am, if I could get one," he answered, a pathetic doubt of his own capacity for earning his living, showing from his small, restless eyes.

"Well, my man and me, we want a boy of about your size to help with the tinkering, look after the horse, and make himself useful; and if so be you like to take the place, you shall have your food and sixpence a week to start with."

"But, 'Lizer!" began the tinker, helplessly; only

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she cut him short, saying quite sharply: "You wanted a boy to help, you said so; and this being a little chap, he can sleep in the box under the wagon."

"So he can," assented the man, mentally measuring Tim's dimensions.

Tim joyfully assented to this proposition, and yielding up his tins without further ado, received in return two half-crowns, which the tinker's wife made into a little bundle for him, tying them round his neck to ensure their safety. After this he had some supper, which he shared with the dog; then, the caravan having come to a standstill for the night on a piece of waste land by the side of the road, the horse was unharnessed and tethered by a long rope to the wagon wheel; after which Tim was instructed to creep into a long box, slung under the vehicle, where he slept warm and cosily with the dog beside him until the morning.

His duties proved to be manifold, and for the next week Tim worked harder than he had ever done in his life before. But the food, though rude, was plentiful, and, despite the loss of his father, he was happier than at any time since leaving Witford. The tinker, though gruff and surly in manner and speech, was not a bad master, whilst the tinker's wife proved a kindly soul not difficult to please, nor given to

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expecting too much in the way of work from her fellow-creatures.

At the end of that week Tim received the promised sixpence; and on the evening of the very next day the little caravan came to a halt on the turnpike about half a mile from Witford town, and Tim looking across the valley could see the windows of Prospect Place all aglow with the radiance of the setting sun. Just below stood the thatched cottage, though in the distance he could not make it out; and thus, after weeks of wandering, he was once more in sight of home.

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CHAPTER XIII.

PROSPECTING.

THE tinker, Mike, intended to halt for two days on the outskirts of Witford, and afterwards to push on towards London, where he intended to winter.

Meanwhile, Tim had made a partial confidante of the tinker's wife, and she, with womanly quickness of comprehension, had filled up the blanks where his story halted.

"You ought to let your Aunt Luce know you're here, and then you can go along with us to London afterwards if you likes," she decided; and so that night, when the darkness had fallen and the harvest moon had only began to show like a disc of silver on the edge of the horizon, Tim set forth to re-visit his old home, the dog, as usual, trailing behind him.

Although Prospect Place had been quite visible

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from the turnpike road before the dusk had fallen, it entailed a walk of two miles or more to reach it, as it was only possible to cross the river by the town bridge.

At first, Tim walked quickly, then as he passed through the town and emerged on the old familiar road leading to Prospect Place his pace flagged, for a host of memories swept over him, and he thought of his father lying in his lonely grave in Shipworth churchyard.

He didn't want to cry, but somehow the tears would come, a perfect rain of them, as he went along the dusty road and up the hill to Prospect Place.

But his tears dried as he entered the garden gate, and, creeping along the path, lifted the latch with almost trembling eagerness. He was too excited to notice that no light shone from the window, and the darkness of the interior came upon him like a shock when he pushed open the door.

Disturbed by his entrance, a big rat scudded across the floor towards the fireless hearth, where it had its lair; but the dog sprang after it, seizing it by the back and tossing it high in the air, let it drop back dead on the stone floor, after which the creature went sniffing round at the various objects yet remaining in the poor room, which appealed, in some strange manner, to its canine memory.

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"Why, the table's gone too!" exclaimed Tim. The moon was higher now, and flung a shaft of light in through the window and across the empty floor.

He had spoken aloud although he had no auditor but the dog, and now, by the help of that same pale moonbeam, he went searching through the few bare rooms that had once been home. He stumbled up the crazy, worm-eaten stairs with the dog following close behind, but the barrenness of the lower room was but intensified in the chambers above. A few rags, a heap of soiled paper, a mouldy odour as of dirt and decay, and that was all!

Trembling and afraid, Tim crept back to the room below, lingering a moment by the fireless hearth to wonder what it all meant.

Whilst he lingered, loath to go, the dog made another tour of sniffing inspection round the room, then set up a long drawn, doleful howl, that quivered and vibrated through the empty house and out on to the quiet night.

"Stop that!" ejaculated Tim, in angry expostulation; then, too nervous to stay longer, he hurried out through the garden again to the high road once more.

There was nothing left for him now but to make his way back to the tinker's caravan, and confide this

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latest of his troubles to 'Lizer. Of course he might have stepped up the bank towards one of the houses of Prospect Place, and there inquired where Mrs. Giles had gone to live. But Tim remembered his father's injunction to remain hidden for awhile, and decided to run no risk of police detention.

When he reached the caravan standing by the side of the turnpike road, the tinker was hanging over the door, smoking a short, black pipe and talking to a fish-hawker, who, passing that way, had halted for a few minutes' rest on the shaft of the wagon and a brief interchange of civilities with its owner. But the tinker's wife was not visible.

After giving his attention to a few matters which formed his usual nightly duty, Tim crept away to his box beneath the caravan, where, despite his trouble, he was soon fast asleep.

The tinker's wife was very kind to him the next day, and even went so far as to say that whilst the old caravan was able to travel he should never want a home. This brought a certain sort of comfort to Tim, though it did not entirely compensate him for all that he had lost. He thought of his ambition to be a Winster Abbey choir boy, and to sing in a surplice, and how his hopes had been thwarted; and tears of self-pity filled his eyes many times that day as

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he helped the tinker to repair damaged kettles, or groomed the dusty coat of the lean old horse.

Just before sundown he was eating his supper, a big slice of bread, a little slice of cheese, and a handful of onions, when a sudden sound of singing struck on his ear. He was seated on the steps of the wagon, and the road was partly hidden from view by a little thicket of thorn bushes; he was just getting up to see from whence the sound came, when a two-horse wagonette drove past, filled with boys and young lads, and with a clergyman sitting up beside the driver. Tim recognised him as the curate of Holy Trinity, and then, with a start of delight, saw that the end boy on the seat of the fast receding carriage was his old friend, Willie White, the widow's son. They were singing a harvest hymn, and the sweet cadences came floating back on the quiet evening air, long after the sound of the wheels had merged into a dull, indistinguishable murmur.

"Now where be they off to, I wonder?" Tim asked himself in some curiosity, coming out from the seclusion of the thorn bushes to stand in the middle of the road and gazing fixedly away into the distance, where the highway curved beyond his range of vision.

"P'raps they be going to sing at the Abbey," he said, speaking aloud, then dived back to the thorn

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bushes again as quickly as he could, for he heard wheels approaching from behind, and a moment later another load of boys passed, only these were laughing, not singing, and among them Tim recognised some of the Saint Mary's choir boys.

"Yes, it's the Abbey; of that I'll take my affydavid," he said, with a little skip of delight at his own shrewdness, though it is extremely doubtful whether he knew what an affidavit really was.

"And I'll go myself and see what it's all about!" he exclaimed; then stuffing the unfinished remnant of his supper into his pocket, he went back to the door of the caravan and called, softly, "Missus, missus."

"Yes," replied the voice of the tinker's wife from within, "what do you want, boy?"

"I be going off for an hour or so over the fields to Winster, and I'll tie the old dog to the wheel alongside of the horse, 'cos I can't take him along to-night."

"All right, laddie, but don't wear yersel' out, for we takes the road at sunrise you know, and Mike won't like it if you're too tired for work."

"I'll be as fresh as a daisy, don't you fear," replied Tim, and then, having tied the dog securely to the wheel, though not without some protesting on the part of the animal, he set forth with a brisk step on the way to Winster.

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But he did not keep to the road, as that wound more than a mile in order to cross the river. Instead, he crossed a few fields until he emerged in a green lane, and after following that a short distance, struck into another field-path, which led him into Maggot's Grove.

It was keen enjoyment to him to see all the familiar places again; but it was keen pain also, for he was looking at them for the last time, perhaps, for ever. There were tears in his eyes by the time he reached the end of the Grove, but he brushed them away with the back of his hand, and pushed along as fast as he could, for night was falling fast, and he did not want to be late in returning.

Long before he reached Winster he could see the lighted Abbey windows, and ever and anon a waft of music was borne on the breeze to him, as half running, half walking, he panted across the intervening fields.

The churchyard was empty and silent when he reached it, saving for the echoes of the vicar's voice reading the prayers within the building. After a moment he paused, and there swelled out a mighty burst of a melodious Amen, then the voice went on again, until broken by another burst of harmonious response.

Tim crouched by a flying buttress like a thief, or

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a spirit of the dark. With his whole strength he was craving a sight of that brilliantly-lighted interior; yet he knew that he dared not venture to cross the threshold and face the battery of so many recognising eyes.

At length there came a more sustained burst of harmony. They were singing a harvest anthem, and the music so thrilled the heart of the poor little wanderer that he could bear it no longer, and swarming up the gnarled trunk of an ancient yew tree, he craned his neck to look in at the window just beyond the porch.

This looked directly into the chancel, and by reaching forward and twisting his neck to a frightful angle, he could see the rows on rows of white-robed choristers as they stood with their eyes for the most part fixed upon their books.

Presently, the swelling, pealing notes of the organ grew softer, the chorus of voices died away, and then a single voice, liquid and sweet as that of a lark rising up from its nest in a clover-field, stole through the crowded church, and out to the quiet churchyard.

"'I will lay me down in peace, and sleep,'" trilled the voice, "'in peace, in peace and sleep.'"

It was Willie White. Tim knew the voice directly, and he could see him too, standing almost close to the

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altar rails, his face a little uplifted, and pale with the strain of his nervous emotion.

Forgetting himself, carried away by his delight, Tim swayed farther forward, slipped, caught at the branch to save himself, lurched violently into space—and all was blank.

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CHAPTER XIV.

PROVIDED FOR.

WHEN next Tim opened his eyes, he was lying in the very cleanest and whitest bed that he had ever seen. A sort of feeble wonder as to where he was, and how he came there, flitted through his brain; but he was still too dazed and shaken to have any very active curiosity on the subject. For a little time he lay looking about him; a shaded lamp was burning on a table near the bed, and the room was filled with a dim, soft light.

"'I will lay me down in peace, and sleep.'" The words seemed beating themselves out in Tim's brain, and so, half unconsciously, he gave them utterance, and then started nervously at the sound of his own voice. But he was not alone, though he had thought himself to be so; just then a lady, who had been sitting by the head of the bed, came forward and asked him in kind tones if he felt better.

Tim stared at her, and tried to answer; but, instead

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of the words he had meant to say, there came: "'I will lay me down in peace, and sleep.'"

"Yes, yes, dear, that is right; 'in peace, and sleep,'" said the lady; and then she gave him something to drink, whereupon Tim went to sleep again, nor woke until the sun was shining broadly in at the window. Three gentlemen were standing between the bed where Tim was lying and the window; they were talking together in low tones, and had not noticed that the boy's eyes were open.

"It depends entirely upon his mental condition when he next wakes," said one, whom Tim recognised as Dr. Hylton.

"Poor little creature! so young, and so desolate!" exclaimed another; and Tim felt a thrill of pleasure at the well-remembered north country burr of Mr. Tracy. The other was Mr. Greville, the vicar, and Tim wondered mightily how it came about that these three should be in consultation by his bed.

"Please, what's the matter with me?" he ventured, after a vain attempt to move his limbs.

The three gentlemen turned quickly at the sound of his voice, and Dr. Hylton, coming to his side, took hold of his wrist, and asked him if he felt rested.

"I ain't tired, sir; but I can't move," he replied, anxiety in his small, keen eyes.

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"Never mind, it's nothing to worry about; you have broken your leg, and will have to lie still until it is better; the marvel is that you did not break your neck," Dr. Hylton said, sharply, though not unkindly, searching Tim's face the while with his keen eyes.

"I wanted to hear the singing, and to see them all in their surplices," explained Tim, in self-defence.

"Oh, I see! and so you climbed into the yew tree. Why didn't you go inside?"

"Because I didn't dare; folks 'ud know me, and—but, I say, am I 'took'?" And an agony of suspense lurked in Tim's heart as he waited for the doctor to answer.

But it was Mr. Greville who spoke: "No, my boy; we found you lying on the church-path, and Mrs. Greville had you brought here to the vicarage."

"Where you will stay until you are better, and then you shall sing in a surplice yourself," broke in Mr. Tracy; and then, bidding him go to sleep again, the three gentlemen left the room.

But Tim's brain was too active for slumber just then; instead, he lay busily piecing events together as the memory of them came back to him, until it became all clear, after which he obeyed the doctor's injunction, and went to sleep.

For a few days after this no one came into his

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room, saving Mr. and Mrs. Greville, the doctor, and an old woman who nursed him. But when nearly a week was over, Tim awoke one afternoon to find Willie White sitting beside him, with a welcoming smile for him when he opened his eyes.

"Willie!" exclaimed Tim.

"Yes, and I've got to take care of you till tea-time," answered Willie.

"I say! where's Mike, and 'Lizer, and the old dog?" Tim asked, after a few minutes of active question and reply on both sides.

Willie's face fell. "The poor old thing was in such a state about being tied up that in trying to get loose, it got entangled in the rope and killed," he said, hardly venturing to look at Tim, fearing lest the tidings of the dog's untimely end should distress him.

"Poor old thing! and he were so set on father," Tim murmured, softly.

But Willie's tale of death and loss was not all done yet. "Your Aunt Luce, Tim; do you know that she's dead too?"

"Is she?" Tim asked, a vague loneliness stealing over him, though he could as yet scarcely realise his position.

"Mike and his wife have gone away, they couldn't

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wait, they said; and Mr. Tracy is going to look after you," Willie went on.

"Is he? Shall I work in the mill?" Tim asked, eagerly.

"No, he is going to send you away to school, I think, so that folks may forget to call you Weasel Tim any more."

"Oh!" Tim said no more just then, but lay still and pondered. It was not pleasant to reflect that he must go to school again; but if by doing so, he might cease to be a by-word and a reproach amongst his fellows, how gladly would he face the ordeal and labour manfully to master the mysteries of knowledge; his reward—that from henceforth no one would speak of him as

"WEASEL TIM."

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